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ISAAC ASIMOV
Star in the East

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VENUS ON THE HALF-SHELL
by Kilgore Trout

ROBERT AICKMAN
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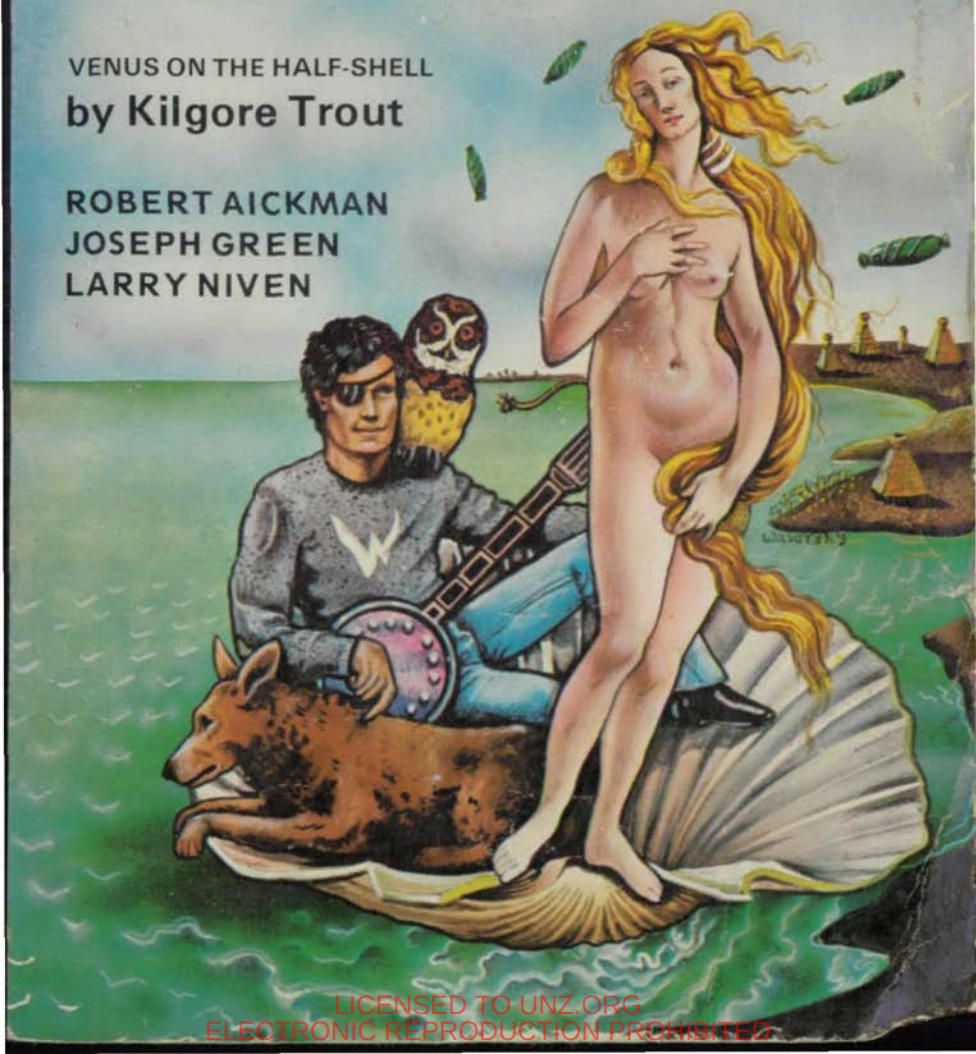

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Venus on the Half-Shell

by KILGORE TROUT

There are thankfully enough writers who have ignored the dictum "don't write about writers" (Who else is going to write about them?), so that we have a fair body of fiction with writers as characters. In sf, for example, we have Hawthorne Abendsen, the novelist in Philip Dick's *The Man in the High Castle,* Heinlein's Jubal Harshaw, Ron Goulart's Jose Silvera, and most recently, Barry Malzberg's Jonathan Herovit. Outside the field, there are Jack London's Martin Eden, and Wouk's Youngblood Hawke, among many others.

The most famous contemporary fictional author is Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s Kilgore Trout, and probably more is known about Trout than about any of his colleagues. Trout is not only famous, he is, of course, a writer of science fiction, and we are pleased to introduce him to sf readers with this wild and entertaining story about the adventures of Simon Wagstaff, the Space Wanderer.

Kilgore Trout in a basement study. *Photo by Emily Sutton.*

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kilgore Trout was born in 1907 of American parents on the British island of Bermuda. Trout attended grammar school there until his father's job with the Royal Ornithological Society terminated. The family moved to Dayton, Ohio, where Trout graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in 1924. Thereafter, he wandered around the country, working at menial low-paying jobs and writing science fiction in his spare time. His only known residences during this period are Hyannis, Mass., Indianapolis, Ind., and Ilium and Cohoes, N.Y.

He has been married and divorced three times and has one child, Leo, a veteran of Vietnam.

As of 1974, Trout has written 117 novels and 2000 short stories. Yet until recently he was little known. This regrettable situation was due to Trout's extreme reclusivity and his indifference to the publication of his stories. He was also ill-advised in his choice of publishers, the chief one, World Classics Library, being a firm specializing in pornographic novels and magazines. This ensured that his works would be distributed only to stores specializing in this genre. Yet Trout's work, with one exception,* contained little explicitly erotic content. Without Trout's permission or knowledge, World Classics Library put lurid covers on his novels and used his short stories as fillers in "girlie" magazines.

In the past few years, however, his fiction has come to the attention of some notable critics and writers in both mainstream and science fiction. It has been praised for its high imagination and Swiftean satire. Professor Pierre Versins, for instance, in his massive study *Encyclopedie de l'Utopie, des Voyages Extraordinaries, et de la Science Fiction,* Editions l'Age d'Homme, S.A., Lausanne, Switzerland, 1973, says of Trout, "A thesis on the too-neglected works of this author would be most welcome."

This is true, but the task of collecting his entire corpus of works is formidable. Even the wealthiest and most indefatigable of collectors cannot boast that they have all of Trout's stories. *Venus on the Half-shell* for instance, is so rare that its only known possessor required a large sum for its purchase so that it could be reprinted.

However, as one prominent writer has predicted, Trout's career is on the upswing. Kilgore Trout is ready to enter the literary mainstream. That the author is no longer indifferent to his brainchildren is shown by his insistence on rewriting *Venus on the Half-shell,* updating it somewhat, and expanding the character of Chworktap.

— The Editor

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*The Son of Jimmy Valentine, *his only nonscience-fiction novel. Negotiations are being conducted to make this available for the first time in general bookstores.*

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Venus On The Half-Shell

by KILGORE TROUT

Chapter 1

The Legend of the Space Wanderer

Go, traveler.

Go anywhere. The universe is a big place, perhaps the biggest. No matter. Wherever you land, you'll hear of Simon Wagstaff, the Space Wanderer.

Even on planets where he has never appeared, his story is sung in ballads and told in spaceport taverns. Legend and folklore have made him a popular figure throughout the ten billion inhabitable planets, and he is the hero of TV series on at least a million, according to the latest count.

The Space Wanderer is an Earthman who never grows old. He wears levis and a shabby gray sweater with brown leather elbow patches. On its front is a huge monogram: SW. He has a black patch over his right eye. He always carries an atomic-powered electrical banjo. He has three constant companions: a dog, an owl, and a female robot. He's a sociable gentle creature who never refuses an autograph. His only fault, and it's a terrible one, is that he asks questions no one can answer. At least, he did up to a thousand years ago, when he disappeared.

This is the story of his quest and why he is no longer seen in the known cosmos.

Oh, yes, he also suffers from an old wound in his pestorior and thus can't sit down long. Once, he was asked how it felt to be ageless.

He replied, "Immortality is a pain in the ass."

Chapter 2

It Always Rains on Picnics

Making love on a picnic is nothing new. But this was on top of the head of the Sphinx of Giza.

Simon Wagstaff was not enjoying it one hundred percent. Ants, always present at any outdoor picnic anywhere, were climbing up his legs and buttocks. One had even gotten caught where nobody but Simon had any business being. It must have thought it had fallen down between the piston and cylinder of an old-fashioned automobile motor.

Simon was persevering, how-

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ever. After a while he and his fiancee rolled over and lay panting and staring up at the Egyptian sky.

"That was good, wasn't it?" Ramona Uhuru said.

Simon thought about telling her about the ant. But if it was still running — or limping — around, she'd be the first to know it.

"It certainly wasn't run of the mill," Simon said. "Come on. We'd better get our clothes on before some tourists come up here."

Simon stood up and put on his black levis, baggy gray sweatshirt, and imitation camel-leather sandals. Ramona slid into her scarlet caftan and opened the picnic basket. This was full of goodies, including a bottle of Ethiopian wine: Carbonated Lion of Judah.

Ramona, talking about something or other, smoothed out the Navajo blanket made in Japan. Ramona had been made in Memphis (Egypt, not Tennessee).

Simon had been made during his parents' honeymoon in Madagascar. His father was part Greek, part Irish Jew, a musical critic who wrote under the name of K. Kane. Everybody thought, with good reason, that the K. stood for Killer. He had married a beautiful Ojibway Indian mezzo-soprano who sang under the name of Minnehaha Langtry. The air-conditioning had broken down on their wedding night, and they attributed Simon's shortcomings to the inclement conditions in which he had been conceived. Simon attributed them to his eight months in a plastic womb. His mother had not wanted to spoil her figure, and so he had been removed from her womb and put in a cylinder connected to a machine. Simon had understood why his mother had done this. But he could not forgive her for later going on an eating jag and gaining sixty pounds. If she was going to become obese anyway, why hadn't she kept him where he belonged?

It was, however, no day for brooding on childhood hurts. The sky was as blue as a baby's veins, and the breeze was air-conditioning the outdoors.

He picked up the guidebook and read it while drinking the wine. The guidebook said that the sphinx originated with the Egyptians. They thought of it as a creature that had a man's face and a lion's body. On the other hand, the Greeks, once they found out about the sphinx, made it into a creature with a woman's head and a lioness' body. She even had women's breasts, lovely white pink-tipped cones that must have distracted men when they should have been thinking about the answer to her question. Oedipus had ignored those obsta-

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cles to thought, which maybe didn't say much for Oedipus. He was a little strange, married his mother, killed his father. He had answered the sphinx's question correctly, but that hadn't kept him out of trouble later.

The guidebook in his hand said that the sphinx's face was supposed to have Pharaoh Chephren's features. The guidebook in his back pocket said that the face was that of the god Harmachis.

It did not matter which had been right. The reconstituted sphinx now bore the features of a famous movie star.

Ramona said, "You're not listening!"

"Sorry," Simon said. And he was. This was one of those rare moments when Ramona suddenly became aware that she was talking to herself. She was scared. People who talk to themselves are either insane, deep thinkers, lonely, or all three. She knew she wasn't crazy or a deep thinker; so she must be lonely. And she feared loneliness worse than drowning, which was her pet horror.

Simon was lonely, too, but chiefly because he felt that the universe was being unfair in not giving answers to his questions. But now was not the time to think of himself.

"Listen, Ramona, here's a love song for you."

It was titled *The Anathematic Mathematics of Love*. This was one of the poems of "Count" Hippolyt Bruga, ne Julius Ganz, an early 20th-century expressionist. Ben Hecht had once written a biography of him, but the only surviving copy was in the Vatican archives. Though critics considered Bruga only a minor poet, Simon loved him best of all and had composed music for many of his works.

First, though, Simon thought he should explain the references and the situation since she didn't read anything but *True Confessions* and best sellers.

"Robert Browning was a great Victorian poet who married the minor poet Elizabeth Barrett," he said.

"I know that," Ramona said. "I'm not as dumb as you think I am. I saw *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* on TV last year. With Peck Burton and Marilyn Mamri. It was so sad; her father was a real bastard. He killed Elizabeth's pet dog just because she ran off with Browning. Old Barrett had eyes for his own daughter, would you believe it? Well, she didn't actually run off. She was paralyzed from the waist down, and Peck, I mean Browning, had to push her wheelchair through the streets of London while her father tried to run them down with a horse and

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buggy. It was the most exciting chase scene I've ever seen."

"I'll bet," Simon said. "So you know about them. Anyway, Elizabeth wrote a series of love poems to Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. He called her his Portuguese because she was so dark."

"How sweet!"

"Yes. Anyway, the most famous sonnet is the one in which she enumerates the varieties of love she has for him. This inspired Bruga's poem, though he didn't set it in sonnet form:"

Simon sang!

"How do I love thee? Let me figure
The ways," said Liz. But mental additions
Subtracted from Bob Browning's emissions,
Dividing the needed vigor to frig her.

Here's what he said to the Portuguese
In order to part her deadened knees.

"Accounting's not the thing that counts.
A plus, a minus, you can shove!
Oh woman below and man above!
It's this inspires the mounts and founts!

"To hell with Euclid's beauty bar!
Liz, get your ass out of that chair!"

"Those were Bruga's last words," Simon said. "He was beaten to death a minute later by an enraged wino."

"I don't blame him," Ramona murmured.

Feathers of sadness fluttered about them. Ramona cackled as if she had just laid an egg. It was, however, nervousness, not joy, that she proclaimed. She always got edgy when he slid into a melancholy mood.

It was then that Ramona became aware that his mood came more from the outside than the inside. The breeze had died, and silence as thick and as heavy as the nativity of a mushroom in a diamond mine, or as gas passed during a prayer meeting, had fallen everywhere. The sky was clotted with clouds as black as rotten spots on a banana. Yet, only a minute before, the horizon had been as unbroken as a fake genealogy.

Simon got to his feet and put his banjo in its case. Ramona busied herself with putting plates and cups in the basket. "You can't depend on anything," she said, close to tears, "It never, just never, rains here in the dry season."

"How'd those clouds get here without a wind?" Simon said.

As usual, his question was not answered.

Ramona had just folded up the blanket when the first rain drops fell. The two started across the top of the head toward the steps but never got to them. The drops

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became a solid body of water, as if the whole sky was a big decanter that some giant drunk had accidentally tipped over. They were knocked down, and the basket was torn from Ramona's hands and sent floating over the side of the head. Ramona almost went over, too, but Simon grabbed her hand and they crawled to the guard fence at the rim of the head and gripped an upright bar.

Later, Simon could recall almost nothing vividly. It was one long blur of numbed horror, of brutal heaviness of the rain, cold, teeth chattering, hands aching from squeezing the iron bar, increasing darkness, a sudden influx of people who'd fled the ground below, a vague wondering why they'd crowded onto the top of the sphinx's head, a terrifying realization of why when a sea rolled over him, his panicked rearing upward to keep from drowning, his releasing the bar because the water had risen to his nose, a single muffled cry from Ramona, somewhere in the smash and flurry, and then he was swimming with nowhere to go.

The case with the banjo in it floated before him. He grabbed it. It provided some buoyancy, and after he'd shucked all his clothing, he could stay afloat by hanging on to it and treading water. Sometime later, he drifted by the tip of the Great Pyramid. Simon floated on by vainly trying to comprehend that somehow so much rain had fallen that the arid land of Egypt was now drowned in 472 feet of water.

And then there came the time in the darkness of night and the still almost-solid rain when he prepared to give up his water-logged ghost and let himself sink. Simon was an atheist, but he prayed to Jawhweh, his father's god; Mary, his grandmother's favorite deity; and Gitche Manitou, his mother's god. It couldn't hurt.

Before he was done, he bumped into something solid. Something that was also hollow, since it boomed like a drum beneath the blows of the rain.

A few seconds afterward, the booming stopped. He was so numb that it was some time before he understood that this was because the rain had also stopped.

He groped around the object. It was coffin-shaped but far too large to be a coffin unless a dead elephant was in it. Its top was slick and about eight inches above water. He lifted the banjo case and shoved it inward. The object dipped a little under his weight, but by placing the flats of his palms on it, he got enough friction to pull himself slowly onto the flat surface and then onto its center.

He lay there panting, face-

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down, too cold and miserable to sleep. Despite which, he went to sleep, though his dreams were not pleasant. But, then, they seldom were.

When he awoke, he looked at his watch. It was 07:08. He had slept at least twelve hours, though it hadn't been refreshing. Then, feeling warm on one side, he turned over slowly. A dog was snuggled up against him. After a while, the dog opened one eye. Simon patted it and lay back face-down, his arm around it. He was hungry, which made him wonder if he wouldn't end up having to eat the dog. Or vice versa. It was a mongrel weighing about sixty pounds to his one hundred and forty. It was probably stronger than he and bound to be very hungry. Dogs were always hungry.

He fell asleep again, and when he awoke it was night again. The dog was up, a dim yellow-brown, long-muzzled shape walking stiffly around as if it had arthritis. Simon called it to him because he didn't want it upsetting the delicate balance. It came to him and licked his face, though whether from a need for affection or a desire to find out how he tasted, Simon did not know. Eventually, he fell asleep, waking as stiff as a piece of driftwood (or a bone long buried by a dog). But he was warm. The clouds were gone, the sun was up, and the water on the surface of the object had dried off.

For the first time, he could see it, though he still did not know what it was. It was about ten feet long and seven wide and had a transparent plastic cover.

He looked straight down into the face of a dead man.

Chapter 3

Abridgment by Invocation

Strum on the old banjo, Simon, while the goddess, the muse of many lays, whispers into your ear the words you must sing so that we can hurry on into the story. Sing of how you found yourself on top of a glass case containing the mummy of Merneptah. He was the Pharaoh who gave Moses a hard time, though Moses and the writers of the Old Testament gave him a worse. His mummy had been on exhibition in an airtight case, and so now it floated, and so it saved Simon and the dog. For days they drifted, eating parts of dried-up, resin-soaked Pharaoh and getting sick from and of him.

Sing, Simon, of how you named the dog Anubis, after the jackal-headed god of the dead of the ancient Egyptians. Sing of how you abandoned the case for the *Hwang Ho*, the crewless Chinese space freighter you encountered

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floating on the sea. Sing of how you and the dog ate deeply of its goodies, though you were hungry an hour afterwards. Sing, Simon, of how an owl flew into the ship and you adopted her, or was it the other way around? And you named her Athena, after the goddess of wisdom, who carried an owl around on her shoulder, thus causing sanitary problems.

And sing, Simon, of how you sang a sad song with these lines:

"Earth is all washed up.
The game of life there was called off
On account of rain.
There will be no refunds."

And sing, Simon, of how the *Hwang Ho* drifted onto Mount Ararat, and how you walked out onto its peak, marveling at the coincidence, which could happen only in a bad novel or in life. Sing of how you stared, silent, with a wild surmise (you're not above stealing from Keats). Except for the high places, Earth was covered with water. Were you the only human left alive?

And then sing, Simon, of how you saw the old man, the ancient space mariner.

Chapter 4

What's The Score?

The old man that staggered babbling toward him looked as if he was a hundred years old. His head was bald, and he had a long gray beard that fell to his knees. His clothes were of a style that had gone out of fashion over six hundred years ago. He was wearing yellow kid gloves, a white ruff, and a coat too tight in the waist. Actually, he was six centuries old, but he'd aged slowly because he'd spent so much time in faster-than-light ships.

Simon conducted the old man into the *Hwang Ho*. He sat him down in an easy chair and gave him a glass of rice wine. The old man drank it all at once, and then, holding Simon with a skinny hand, he spoke.

"Who won the series?"

"What?" Simon said. "What series?"

"The World Series of 2457," the old man said. "Was it the St. Louis Cardinals or the Tokyo Tigers?"

"For God's sake, how would I know?" Simon said.

The old man groaned and poured himself another glass of wine. He smelled it, wrinkled his nose, and said, "You got any beer?"

Simon went into the pantry for the only bottle of beer left. This must have been the property of the sole German sailor aboard. By his bunk were portraits of Beethoven, Bismarck, Hitler (after a millen-

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nium, a romantic hero), and Otto Munchkin, the first man to die in a Volkswagen. The sailor also had a small library, mostly Chinese or German books. Simon had been intrigued by the title of one, *Die Fahrt der Snark,* but it turned out not to be a commentary on Lewis Carroll's digestive problems after all. It was all about a journey some early 20th-century writer named Jack London had made to the South Seas. London had later on committed suicide when the people he loved and trusted gave him the shaft.

Simon returned to the old man and handed him the beer.

"Do you remember now?" the ancient said.

"Remember what?"

"Who won the Series?"

"I never cared for baseball," Simon said. "You *are* talking about baseball, aren't you?"

"I thought you were an American?"

"There are no nationalities any more," Simon said. "Just Earth people, an endangered species. What's your name?"

"Silas T. Comberbacke, Spaceman First Class," the old man said. He drank deeply and sighed with ecstasy.

Once Comberbacke's mind was off baseball, he talked as if he hadn't spoken in English in six hundred years. Which was true. He'd left Earth in 2457 A.D. because his fiancee had run off with a hair dresser.

"Which gives you some idea of her basic personality," old Comberbacke said. "Jesus, he knew nothing about baseball!"

One day, while drinking in a bar on a planet in Galaxy NGC 7217, Comberbacke suddenly decided to go home and find out who had won the 2457 series. He'd been asking other spacemen for years, but even the aficionados didn't know. They were all too young to remember that far back. So, on impulse, he'd "borrowed" a tiny spacecraft and taken off. "I got here two days ago, parked my ship on the other side of the mountain, and walked around trying to find someone who could tell me what the score was."

"I was hoping you'd know what caused this rain," Simon said.

"Oh, I do! I meant, who won the series? The day I left, the Cardinals and the Tigers were tied. Damnit, if I hadn't been so mad at Alma, I'd have stayed until it was over."

"I know my question is trivial," Simon said. "But what *did* happen to make it rain so hard?"

"Don't get so mad," the old spacer said. "If you'd seen as many wrecked worlds as I have and as many about to be wrecked, you wouldn't take it so personal."

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Comberbacke finished his bottle and drummed his fingers on the arm of the chair. Finally, Simon said, "Well, what did happen?"

"Well, it must of been them Hoonhors!"

"What's a Hoonhor?"

"Jesus, kid, you don't know nothing, do you?" Comberbacke said. "They're the race that's been cleaning up the universe!"

Simon sighed and patiently asked him to back up and start at the beginning. The Hoonhors, he found, were a people from a planet of some unknown galaxy a trillion light-years away. They were possibly the most altruistic species in the universe. They had done very well for themselves, and now they were out doing for others.

"One thing they can't stand is seeing a people kill off their own planet. You know, pollution. So they've been locating these, and when they do, they clean it up.

"They've sanitized, that's what they call it, sanitizing, they've sanitized maybe a thousand planets so far in the Milky Way alone. Haven't you *really* ever heard of them?"

Comberbacke knew that it was the Hoonhors who had caused the Second Deluge. He'd seen one of their ships heading out when he went past the orbit of Pluto on his way in.

"What they do, they release into a planet's atmosphere a substance that precipitates every bit of H_2O in the air. You wouldn't believe the downpour!"

"Yes, I would," Simon said.

The old man got drunk and passed out. Simon put him to bed and took the dog for a walk. The breeze, which came from the south, was thick and sticky with the odor of rotting bodies. As the water had evaporated, it had left bodies of animals, birds, and humans along the slope of the mountain. This made the few surviving vultures and rats happy, which goes to show that the old proverb about an ill wind is true. But the wind almost gagged Simon. He couldn't hang around here much longer unless he shut himself up in the ship and waited for the rotting meat to be eaten up.

Simon looked down from the cliff on the bodies of hundreds of men, women, and children, and he wept.

All of them had once been babies who needed and wanted love and who thought that they would be immortal. Even the worst of them longed for love and would have been the better for it if he or she had been able to find it. But the more they grabbed for it, the more unlovable they had become. Even the lovable find it hard to get love. So what chance did the unlovable have?

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The human species had been trying for a million years to find love and immortality. They had talked a lot about both, but humankind always talked most about those things which did not exist. Or, if they did, were so rare that almost nobody recognized them when they saw them. Love was rare, and immortality was only a thing hoped-for, unproven and unprovable.

At least, it was so on Earth.

A little while later, he stood up and shook his fist at the sky.

And this was when he decided to leave Earth and start asking the primal question.

Why are we created only to suffer and to die?

Chapter 5

The Boojum of Space

Simon explored the area on foot. He found the one-man spaceship where Comberbacke had left it. It had been built by the Titanic & Icarus Spaceship Company, Inc., which didn't inspire confidence in Simon. After looking it over, however, he decided to fly it back to the *Hwang Ho.* He would store it in the big dock area in the ship's stern. He could use it for a shuttle or a lifeboat during his voyages through interstellar space.

When he got back to the big ship, he discovered that the old man was gone. Simon set out on foot again. After he had walked down the muddy slope, he found Comberbacke rooting around among the ruins of a village. The old man looked up when he heard Simon's feet pulling out of the mud with a sucking sound.

"Even an Armenian village must have a library," he said. "Nobody's illiterate any more. So there must be a book that gives the scores of the World Series."

"Is that all it'll take to make you happy?"

The old man thought a minute, then said, "No. If I could get a hardon, I'd be a lot happier. But what good would that do? There ain't a woman in sight."

"I was thinking more of somebody who'd be a companion for you and maybe a nurse, too."

"Find somebody who likes baseball," Comberbacke said.

Simon went away shaking his head. It was dusk when he got back to the ship. Light streamed out from the main sideport, which had been left open. He hurried into the ship and closed the port after him. He called out the old man's name. Comberbacke did not reply. Simon went to the recreation room and found the old man in a chair. The side of his head was blown off. A Chinese pistol lay on his lap. On the table before him was a mud-and-water-stained book, its

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open pages streaked with water. But it wasn't rain that had fallen on these pages. The marks were from tears.

The book was the *Encyclopedia Terrica*, Volume IX, Barracuda-Bay Rum.

There was no farewell note from Comberbacke, but Simon read under *Baseball, World Series*, all he needed to know. The 2457 Series had ended in a scandal. In the middle of the final game, Cardinals 3-Tigers 4, police officers had arrested five St. Louis men. The commissioner had just been given proof that they had taken money from gamblers to throw the Series. The Tokyo Tigers won by default, and the five men had been given the maximum sentences.

Simon buried the old man and erected a marker over him. On the stone he scratched these letters:

SILAS T. COMBERBACKE

2432 — 3069

Spaceman & Baseball Fan

This stone conceals a Cardinal sin.
A glut of centuries passed before
He learned about that fateful inning.
How good if he'd continued chinning
On Space's bar! His hero a whore,
He cared no more for the stadium's din.
It's better not to know the score.

That last line was good advice, but Simon wasn't taking it.

He went into the *Hwang Ho*, closed the port, and seated himself before the control panel in the bridge. The stellar maps were stored in the computer circuits. If Simon wanted to go to the sixth planet of 61 Cygni A, for instance, he had only to press the right keys. The rest was up to the computer.

"Take me to some unexplored galaxy, and we'll play it by ear from there," Simon typed.

A few seconds later they were off into the black unknown. The ship was capable of attaining 69,000 times the speed of light, but Simon held it down to 20,000 X. The drive itself was named the soixante-neuf drive because this meant sixty-nine in French. It had been invented in 2970 A.D. by a Frenchman whose exact name Simon didn't recall. Either it was Pierre le Chanceux or Pierre le Chancreux, he wasn't sure which, since he'd not made a study of space history.

When the first ship equipped with the drive, the *Golden Goose*, had been revved up to top speed, those aboard had been frightened by a high screaming noise. This had started out as a murmur at about 20,000 times the speed of light. As the ship accelerated, the sound became louder and higher. At 69X, the ship was filled with the

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kind of noise you hear when a woman with a narrow pelvis is giving birth or a man has been kicked in the balls. There were many theories about where this screaming came from. Then, in 2980, Dr. Maloney, a brilliant man when sober, solved the mystery. It was known that the drive got all but its kickoff energy from tapping into the fifth dimension. This dimension contained stars just like ours, except that they were of a fifth-dimensional shape, whatever that was. These stars were living creatures, beings of complex energy structures, just as the stars in our universe were alive. Efforts to communicate with the stars, however, had failed. Maybe they, like the porpoises, just didn't care to talk to us. Never mind. What did matter was that the drive was drawing off the energy of these living things. They didn't like being killed. Ergo, Dr. Maloney explained, they screamed.

This relieved a lot of people. Some, however, insisted that interstellar travel must stop. We might be killing intelligent beings. Their opponents pointed out that that was regrettable, if true. But since other species were using the drive, the stars would be killed anyway. If we refused to use it, we wouldn't have progress. And we'd be at the mercy of merciless aliens from outer space.

Besides, there wasn't any evidence that fifth-dimensional stars were any more intelligent than earthworms.

Simon didn't know what the truth of the matter was. But he hated to hear the screaming, which was so loud at 69X that even earplugs didn't help. So he kept the ship at 20X. At that speed, he hoped he'd only be bruising the stars a little.

The dog had been whimpering and whining for some time but suddenly it began barking loudly and racing around. He shouted at Anubis, who paid him no attention at all. Finally, Simon remembered something he had read in school and seen in various TV series. He became scared, though he was not sure that he had good reason to be so.

As everybody knew, dogs were psychic. They saw things which men used to call ghosts. Now it was known that these were actually fifth-dimensional objects which had passed through normal space unperceived by the gross senses of man. These went through certain channels formed by the shape of the fifth dimension. The main channel on Earth went through the British Islands, which was why England had more "ghosts" than any other place on the planet.

Every Earth ship that put out to space beyond the solar system

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carried a dog. Radar, being limited to the speed of light, was no good for a vessel going at superlight speeds. But a dog could detect other living beings even at a million light-years distance if they were also in soixante-neuf drive. To the dogs, other beings in this extradimensional world *were* ghosts, and ghosts scared hell out of them.

He pressed a button. A screen sprang to life, showing him the view from the right side of the ship. He didn't expect to see the approaching ship, since it was going faster than light. But he could see a black funnel coming at an angle which would intercept his course. This, he knew, was the trail left by a vessel with soixante-neuf drive. It was one of the peculiarities of the drive that a ship radiated behind it a "shadow," a conical blackness of unknown nature. Simon, if he had looked out his own rearview screen, would have seen only a circle of nothingness directly behind the ship.

He was convinced that the ship approaching him was a Hoonhor and that it was out to get him. That was the only reason he could think of why the ship hadn't changed its course, which would result in collision if it maintained it. Probably, the Hoonhors intended to keep him from notifying other worlds of what they had done to Earth.

He stepped on the accelerator pedal and kept it to the floor while the speedometer needle crept toward the right hand edge of the dial. He also twisted the wheel to the left to swerve the ship away. The stranger immediately changed its course to follow him.

The murmur from the two engine rooms became a loud and piercing shriek. Anubis howled with agony, and the owl flew around screaming. Simon put plugs in his ears, but they couldn't keep out the painful noise. Nor could he plug up his conscience. Somewhere, on one of the fifth-dimensional universes, a living being was undergoing terrible torture so he could save his own neck.

It was then that a control panel siren began whooping, and its lights flashed red. Simon became even more alarmed. A space boojum was directly ahead of the ship.

Boojums were a sort of manhole in a transdimensional sewage system. Or a slot in a multidimensional roulette wheel. All the boojums in this universe were entrances to other-dimensional worlds, and if a ship got sucked into one, it could be lost forever in the maze of connections. Or, if its crew was lucky, it could

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be shot back into this universe. Simon's only escape, like it or not, was to dive into the boojum. He doubted that the Hoonhor captain would have the guts to follow him into it.

The next thing he knew, everything had turned black. Nor was there any sound. After what seemed like hours but must have been only a few minutes — if time existed in this place — he felt as if he were melting.

Suddenly, they were out among the stars. Simon almost screamed with joy. They had made it; they weren't doomed to ride forever, like some Flying Dutchman, through the lightless shapeless seas of the boojum.

Simon directed the computer to take the ship to the nearest galaxy and look for an inhabited planet. A week, ship's time, passed. Simon studied philosophy and Chinese, cooked meals for himself and his companions, and cleaned up after the dog and the owl. And then, one day, in the middle of his breakfast, the alarm bell rang. Simon ran to the control room and looked at the control panel screen. Translated, the Chinese words said, "Solar system with inhabitable planet approaching."

Simon ordered the ship to go into orbit around the fourth planet. When the *Hwang Ho* was over it, Simon looked through a telescope which could pick out objects as small as a mouse on the surface. What attracted his attention most was a gigantic tower on the edge of the smallest of the two continents. This was about a mile wide at its base and two miles high. It was shaped like a candy heart, its point stuck in the ground. A hard metal without a break made up its shell. In fact, it looked as if it had been made from a single casting. But the metal was striped with white, black, yellow, green, and blue. These were not painted on but seemed integral to the metal.

The massive structure looked brand-new. However, it was leaning to one side as if the solid granite under it was giving way to the many billions of tons pressing on it. Eventually, maybe in a million or so years, it would fall. It had been there for about a billion years, long before the human population had evolved from apes or even from shrew-sized insect eaters. Perhaps it had even been erected before life had crawled out of the primeval seas, warm and nutritious as a diabetic's urine.

Simon knew something about towers like this one, which was why he was delighted to see it. Interstellar voyagers to distant galaxies had reported finding such towers on every inhabited planet of these systems. There were how-

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ever, none on the planets of Earth's galaxy. Nobody knew why, though many resented this slight.

Of the six million towers so far reported by Earth tourists, all had been just like this one. The natives of various planets had tried everything from diamond-tipped drills to laser beams to hydrogen bombs without scratching the mysterious metal. The buildings were hollow. A hammer could make one ring like a gong. There was even one planet which had a symphony orchestra which played only one instrument, the tower. The musicians stood on scaffolds built at various levels along the tower and struck it with hammers, the size and layout of the rooms within determining the notes evoked. The conductor stood on a platform a mile high and half a mile away and used two flags to wigwag his directions.

The highest point of music in the history of this planet occurred when a conductor, Ruboklngshep, fell off the platform. The orchestra, in trying to follow the wildly waving flags during his descent, produced six bars of the most exquisite music ever to be created, though some critics have disparaged the final three notes. Art, like science, sometimes gets its best results by accident.

Chapter 6

Shaltoon, The Equal-Time Planet

Simon ordered the computer to set the ship down on a big field near the largest building of a city. The people that poured out of the building were human-looking except for pointed ears, yellow eyes which had pupils like a cat's, and sharp-pointed teeth. Simon wasn't startled by this. All the humanoid races so far encountered had either been descended from simians, felines, canines, ursines, or rodents. Simon watched them through his viewscreens. When the soldiers had gathered around the ship, all pointing their spears and bows and arrows at the *Hwang Ho,* he came out. He held his hands up in the air to show he was peaceful. He didn't smile because on some planets baring one's teeth was a hostile sign.

"I'm Simon Wagstaff, the man without a planet," he said.

Simon had a hard time convincing them that he wasn't here to con them. He did want something from them, he told them over and over, but it wasn't anything material. First, did they know anything about the builders of the leaning heart-shaped tower?

The people assigned to escort Simon told him that all they knew was that the builders were called the Clerun-Gowph in this galaxy. Nobody knew why, but somebody somewhere sometime must have met them. Otherwise, why did they

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have a common name? As for the tower, it had been here, unoccupied and slowly tilting, since the Shaltoonians had had a language. Undoubtedly, it had been here a long time before that.

The Shaltoonians had a legend that, when the tower fell, the end of the world would come.

Simon was adaptable and gregarious. But he was uneasy with the Shaltoonians. There was something wrong with them, something he couldn't describe.

Maybe, he thought, it was the strong musky odor that hung over the city, overriding that of manure from the farms around the city. This emanated from every adult Shaltoonian he met and smelled exactly like a cat in heat. After a while, he understood why. They *were* all in the mating season, which lasted the year around. Their main subject of conversation was sex, but even with this subject they couldn't sustain much talk. After a half hour or so, they'd get fidgety and then excuse themselves. If he followed them, he'd find him or her going into a house where he or she would be greeted by one of the opposite sex. The door would be closed, and within a few minutes the damnedest noises would come from the house.

This resulted in his not being able to talk long to the escorts who were supposed to keep an eye on him. They'd disappear, and someone else would take their place.

Moreover, when the escorts showed up again the next day, they acted strangely. They didn't seem to remember what they'd asked or told him the day before. At first, he put this down to a short-term memory. Maybe it was this which had kept the Shaltoonians from progressing beyond a simple agricultural society.

Simon was a good talker, but he was a good listener, too. Once he'd learned the language well, he caught on to a discrepancy of intonation among his escorts. It varied not only among individual speakers, which was to be expected, but in the same individual from day to day. Simon finally decided that he wasn't uneasy because the Shaltoonians were, from his viewpoint, oversexed. He had no moral repugnance to this. After all, you couldn't expect aliens to be just like Earthmen. As a matter of fact, his attitude, if anything, was envy.

Earthmen were dedicated to getting to the top of the heap, whereas the Shaltoonians devoted themselves to getting on top of each other.

This seemed a fine arrangement to Simon — at first. One of the bad things about human society was that few people ever

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really had intimate contact. A people who spent a lot of time in bed, however, should be full of love. But things didn't work out that way on this planet. There wasn't even a word for love in the language. Not that this made much difference generally between Earth and Shaltoon behavior. The latter seemed to have just as many divorces, disagreements, fights, and murders as the former. On the other hand, the Shaltoonians didn't have many suicides. Instead of getting depressed, they went out and got laid.

Simon thought about this aspect. He decided that perhaps Shaltoon society was after all, better arranged than Terrestrial society. Not that this was due to any superior intelligence of the Shaltoons. It was a matter of hormone surplus. Mother Nature, not brains, deserved the credit. This thought depressed him, but he didn't seek out a female to work off the mood. He retired to his cabin and played his banjo until he felt better. Then he got to thinking about the meaning of this and became depressed again. Hadn't he channeled his sex drive where it shouldn't be? Hadn't he made love to himself, via his banjo, instead of to another being? Were the notes spurting from the strings a perverted form of jism? Was his supreme pleasure derived from plucking, not fucking?

Simon put away the banjo, which was looking more like a detachable phallus every minute. He sallied forth determined to use his nondetachable instrument. Ten minutes later, he was back in the ship. He'd passed by a rain barrel and happened to look down in it. There, at the bottom, was a newly born baby. He had looked around for a policeman to notify him but had been unable to find one. It struck him then he had never seen a policeman. He stopped a passer-by and started to ask him where the local precinct had its headquarters. Unable to do so because he didn't know the word for "police," he took the passer-by to the barrel and showed him what was in it. The citizen had merely shrugged and walked away. Simon had walked around until he saw one of his escorts. The woman was startled to see him without a companion and asked why he had left the ship without notifying the authorities. Simon said that that wasn't important. What was important was the case of infanticide he'd stumbled across.

She didn't seem to understand what he was talking about. She followed him and gazed down into the barrel. Then she looked up with a strange expression. Simon, knowing something was wrong, looked again. The corpse was gone.

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"But I swear it was here only five minutes ago!" he said.

"Of course," she said coolly. "But the barrel men have removed it."

It took some time for Simon to get it through his head that he had seen nothing unusual. In fact, the barrels he had observed on every corner and under every rain spout were seldom used to collect drinking water. Their main purpose was for the drowning of infants.

"Don't you have the same custom on Earth?" the woman said.

"It's against the law there to murder babies."

"How in the world do you keep your population from getting too large?" she said.

"We don't."

"How barbaric!"

Simon got over some of his indignation when the woman explained that the average life span of a Shaltoon was ten thousand years. This was due to an elixir invented some two hundred thousand years before. A by-product of this elixir was that a Shaltoon seldom got sick.

"So you see that we have to have some means of keeping the population down," she said. "Otherwise, we'd all be standing on top of each other's heads in a thousand years or less."

"What about contraceptives?"

"Those're against our custom," she said. "They interfere with the pleasure of sex. Besides, everyone ought to have a chance to be born."

Simon asked her to explain this seemingly contradictory remark. She replied that an aborted baby didn't have a soul. But a baby that made it to the open air was outfitted with a soul at the moment of birth. If it died even a few seconds later, it still went to heaven. Indeed, it was better that it did die, because then it would be spared the hardships and pains and griefs of life. However, to keep the population from decreasing, it was necessary to let one out of a hundred babies survive. The Shaltoons let Chance decide who lived and who didn't. Every woman, when she got pregnant, went to the Temple of Shaltoon. There she picked a number at a roulette table, and if her ball fell into the lucky slot, she got to keep the baby. The Holy Croupiers gave her a card with the lucky number on it, which she wore around her neck until the baby was a year old.

"The wheel's fixed so the odds are a hundred to one," she said. "The house usually wins. But when a woman wins, a holiday is declared, and she's queen for a day. This is no big deal, since she spends most of her time reviewing the parade."

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"Thanks for the information," Simon said. "I'm going back to the ship. So long, Goobnatz."

"I'm not Goobnatz," she said. "I'm Dunnernickel."

Simon was so shaken up that he didn't ask her what she meant by that. He assumed that he had had a slip of memory. The next day, however, he apologized to her.

"Wrong again," she said. "My name is Pussyloo."

There was a tendency for all aliens of the same race to look alike to earthmen. But he had been here long enough to distinguish individuals easily.

"Do you Shaltoons have a different name for every day?"

"No," she said. "My name has always been Pussyloo. But it was Dunnernickel you were talking to yesterday and Goobnatz the day before. Tomorrow, it'll be Quimquat."

Simon asked her to explain.

"Don't you Earthmen have ancestor rotation?" she said.

"What the hell's that?" he said.

"It's a biological, not a supernatural, phenomenon," she said. "I guess you poor deprived Terrestrials don't have it. But the body of every Shaltoon contains cells which carry the memories of a particular ancestor. The earliest ancestors are in the anal tissue. The latest are in the brain tissue."

"You mean a person carries around with him the memories of his foreparents?" Simon said.

"That's what I said."

"But it seems to me that in time a person wouldn't have enough space in his body for all the ancestral cells," Simon said. "When you think that your ancestors double every generation backward, you'd soon be out of room. You have two parents, and each of them had two parents, and each of them had two. And so on. You go back only five generations, and you have sixteen great-great-grandparents. And so on."

"And so on," Pussyloo said.

"You have to remember that if you go back about thirty generations, everyone now living has many common ancestors. otherwise, the planet at that time would've been jammed with people like flies on a pile of horse manure.

"But there's another factor that eliminates the number of ancestors. The ancestor cells with the strongest personalities release chemicals that dissolve the weaker ones."

"Are you telling me that, even on the cellular level, the survival of the fittest is the law?" Simon said. "That egotism is the ruling agent?"

Pussyloo scratched the itch between her legs and said, "That's the way it is. There would never

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have been any trouble about it if that's all there was to it. But in the old days, about twenty thousand years ago, the ancestors started their battle for their civil rights. After a long fight, they got an equal-time arrangement. Here's how it works. A person is born and allowed to control his own body until he reaches puberty. During this time, an ancestor speaks only when spoken to."

"How do you do that?" Simon said.

"It's a mental thing the details of which the scientists haven't figured out yet," she said. "Some claim we have a neural circuit we can switch on and off by thought. The trouble is, the ancestors can switch it on, too. They used to give the poor devils that carried them a hard time, but now they don't open up any channels unless they're requested to do so.

"Anyway, when a person reaches puberty, he must then give each ancestor a day for himself/herself. The ancestor comes into full possession of the carrier's body and consciousness. The carrier himself still gets one day a week for himself. So he comes out ahead, though there's still a lot of bitching about it. When the round is completed, it starts all over again.

"Because of the number of ancestors, a Shaltoon couldn't live long enough for one cycle if it weren't for the elixir. But this delays aging so that the average life span is about ten thousand years."

"Which is actually twenty thousand years, since a Shaltoon year is twice as long as ours," Simon said.

He was stunned.

Chapter 7

Queen Margaret

The Space Wanderer had been thinking about moving on. There didn't seem to be much here for him. The Shaltoons did not even have a word for philosophy, let alone for ontology, epistemology, and cosmology. Their interests were elsewhere.

When he found out about ancestor rotation, however, he decided to hang around a little longer. He was curious about the way in which this unique phenomenon shaped the strange and complex structure of Shaltoon society. Also, to be truthful, he had an egotistic reason for being a little reluctant to leave. He enjoyed being lionized, and the next planet might have critics not so admiring.

The first thing Simon found out in his investigations was that ancestor rotation caused a great resistance to change. This was not only inevitable but necessary. The society had to function from day to

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day, crops be grown and harvested and transported, the governmental and business administration carried out, schools, hospitals, courts, et cetera run. To make this possible, a family stayed in the same line of work or profession. If your forefather a thousand generations removed was a ditchdigger, you were one, too. There was no confusion resulting from a blacksmith being replaced by a judge one day and a garbage hauler the next.

The big problem in running this kind of society was the desire of each ancestor to live it up on his day of possession. Naturally, he/she didn't want to waste his/her time working when he/she could be eating, drinking, and copulating. But everybody understood that if he/she indulged in his/her wishes, society would fall apart and the carriers would starve to death in a short time. So, grudgingly, everybody put in an eight-hour day and at quitting time plunged into an orgy. Almost everybody did. Somebody had to take care of the babies and children, and somebody had to work on the farms the rest of the day.

The only way to handle this was to let slaves babysit and finish up the plowing and the chores on the farms. On Shaltoon, once a slave always a slave was the law. Yet, how do you get an ancestral slave to work all day on the only day in five hundred years that he'll take over a carrier? For one thing, who's going to oversee him? No freeman wanted to put in his precious time supervising the helots. And a slave that isn't watched closely is going to goof off.

How did you punish a slave if he neglected his work to enjoy himself? If you hung him, you also killed off thousands of innocents. You also reduced the number of slaves, of which there weren't enough to go around in the first place. If you whipped him, you were punishing the innocent. The day following the whipping, the guilty man/woman retreated into his/her cell, shut off from the pain. The poor devil that followed was the one that suffered. He resented being punished for something he hadn't done, and his morale scraped bottom like a dog with piles.

The authorities had recognized that this was a dangerous situation. If enough slaves got angry enough to revolt, they could take over easily while their masters were helplessly drunk in the midst of the late evening orgy. The only way to prevent this was to double the number of slaves. In this way, a slave could put in four hours on the second shift and then go off to enjoy himself while another slave

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finished up for him. This did have its drawbacks. The slave who took over the last four hours had been whooping it up on his free time and so he was in no shape to work efficiently. But this could not be helped.

The additional slaves required had to be gotten from the freemen. So the authorities passed laws that a man could be enslaved if he spit on the sidewalk or overparked his horse and buggy. There were protests and riots against this legislation, of course. The government expected, in fact hoped for, these. They arrested the rebels and made them slaves. The sentence was retroactive; all their ancestors became slaves also.

Simon talked to a number of the slaves and found out that what he had suspected was true. Almost all the newly created slaves had come from the poor classes. The few from the upper class had been liberals. Somehow or other, the cops never saw a banker, a judge, or a businessman spit on the sidewalk.

Simon became apprehensive when he found out about this. There were so many laws that he didn't know about. He could be enslaved if he forgot to go downwind before farting in the presence of a cop. He was assured, however, that he wasn't subject to the laws.

"Not as long as you leave within two weeks," his informant said. "We wouldn't want you as a slave. You have too many strange ideas. If you stayed here long, you might spread these, infect too many people."

Simon didn't comment. The analogy of new ideas to deadly diseases was not new to him.

One of Simon's favorite writers was a science-fiction author by the name of Jonathan Swift Somers III. He had once written a story about this parallel between diseases and ideas. In his story, *Quarantine!*, an Earthman had landed on an uncharted planet. He was eager to study the aliens, but they wouldn't let him out of the spaceship until he had been given a medical checkup. At first, he thought they suspected him of bringing in germs they weren't equipped to handle. After he'd learned their language, he was told that this wasn't so. The aliens had long ago perfected a panacea against illnesses of the flesh. They were worried about his disrupting their society, perhaps destroying it, with deadly thoughts.

The port officials, wearing lead mind-shields, questioned the Earthman closely for two weeks. He sweated while he talked because the aliens' method of disease prevention, which was one hundred percent effective, was to kill the sick person. His body was then

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burned and his ashes were buried at midnight in an unmarked grave.

After two weeks of grilling, the head official said, smiling, "You can go out among our people now."

"You mean I have a clean bill of health?" the Earthman said.

"Nothing to worry about," official said. "We've heard every idea you have. There isn't a single one we didn't think of ten thousand years ago. You must come from a very primitive world."

Jonathan Swift Somers III, like most great American writers, had been born in the Midwest. His father had been an aspiring poet whose unfinished epic had not been printed until long after his death. Simon had once made a pilgrimage to Petersburg, Illinois, where the great man was buried. The monument was a granite wheelchair with wings. Below was the epitaph:

JONATHAN SWIFT SOMERS III
1910 — 2001
He Didn't Need Legs

Somers had been paralyzed since he was ten years old. In those days, they didn't have a vaccine against polio. Somers never left the wheelchair or his native town, but his mind voyaged out into the universe. He wrote forty novels and two hundred short stories, mostly about adventure in space.

His books about the Moon and Mars were still read long after voyages there had become humdrum. It didn't matter that Somers had been one hundred percent wrong about those places. His books were poetic and dramatic, and the people he depicted going there seemed more real than the people who actually went there. At least, they were more interesting.

Somers belonged to the same school of writing as the great French novelist Balzac. Balzac claimed he could write better about a place if he knew nothing of it. Invariably, when he did go to a place he had described in a book, he was disappointed.

Simon was worried that he, too, might upset the Shaltoons. It was true that he never proposed any new ideas to them. All he did was ask questions. But often these can be more dangerous than propaganda. They lead to novel thoughts.

It seemed, however, that he wasn't going to spark off any novelty in the Shaltoons' minds. The adults were, in effect, never around for more than a day. The young were too busy playing and getting educated for the time when they'd have to give up possession of their bodies.

Near the end of his visit, on a fine sunny morning, Simon left the spaceship to visit the Temple of Shaltoon. He intended to spend the

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day studying the rites being performed there. Shaltoon was the chief deity of the planet, a goddess whose closest Earthly equivalent was Venus or Aphrodite. He walked through the streets, which he found strangely empty. He was wondering what was going on when he was startled by a savage scream. He ran to the house from which it came and opened the door. A man and a woman were fighting to the death in the front room. Simon had a rule that he would never interfere in a quarrel between man and wife. It was a good rule, but one which no humanitarian could keep. In another minute, one or both of the bleeding and bruised couple would be dead. He jumped in between them and then jumped out again and ran for his life. Both had turned against him, which was only to be expected.

Since he was followed out on the street, he kept on running. As he sped down the street, he heard cries and shrieks from the houses he passed. Turning a corner, he collided with a swirling shouting mob, everyone of which seemed intent on killing anybody within range of their fists, knives, spears, swords, and axes. Simon fought his way out and staggered back to the ship. When the port was closed behind him, he crawled to the sick bay — Anubis pacing him with whimpers and tongue-licking — where he bandaged his numerous cuts and gashes.

The next day he cautiously ventured out. The city was a mess. Corpses and wounded were everywhere in the streets, and firemen were still putting out the blazes that had been started the day before. However, no one seemed belligerent, and so he stopped a citizen and asked him about yesterday's debacle.

"It was Shag Day, dummy," the citizen said and moved on.

Simon wasn't too jarred by the rudeness. Very few of the natives were in a good mood when sober. This was because the carrier's body was continually abused by the rotating ancestors. Each had to get all the debauchery he could cram into his allotted time between the quitting whistle and the curfew bell. As a result, the first thing the ancestor felt when he took his turn was a terrible hangover. This lasted through the day, making him tired and irritable until he had had a chance to kill the pain with liquor.

Every once in a while, the body would collapse and be carried off to a hospital by drunken ambulance attendants and turned over to drunken nurses and doctors. The poor devil who had possession that day was too sick to do anything but lie in bed, groaning and cursing.

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The thought that he was wasting his precious and rare day in convalescence from somebody else's fun made him even sicker.

So the Space Wanderer didn't wonder at the grumpiness of the citizen. He walked on and presently found a heavily bandaged but untypically amiable woman.

"Everybody, if you go back a few thousand years, has the same ancestors," she said. "So, every thousand years or so, a day occurs when one particular ancestor happens to come into possession of many carriers. This usually happens to only a few, and we can cope with most of these coincidences. But about five thousand years ago, Shag, a very powerful personality born in the Old Stone Age, took over more than half of the population on a certain day. Since he was an extremely authoritarian and violent man who hated himself, the first Shag Day ended with a quarter of the world's people killing each other."

"And what about yesterday's Shag Day?" Simon said.

"That's the third. It's a record breaker, too. Almost half of the population were casualties."

Simon decided to cut his trip short. He would leave the next day. But that evening, while reading the Shaltoon *Times*, he found out that in four days the wisest person who had ever lived would take over the queen's body. He became excited. If anyone would have the truth, it would be this woman. She'd had more turns at rotation than anyone and combined the greatest intelligence with the longest experience.

The reason that everybody knew that Queen Margaret was due to take over was the rotation chart. This had been worked out for each person. Generally, it was hung on the bathroom wall so it could be studied when there was nothing else to occupy one's mind.

Simon sent in a petition for an audience. He got a reply the same day. The queen would be pleased to dine with him. Formal attire was mandatory.

Resplendent in the dress uniform of the captain of the *Hwang Ho*, a navy-blue outfit adorned with huge epaulets, gold braid, big brass buttons, and twenty Good Conduct medals, Simon appeared at the main door of the palace. He was ushered by a lord of the royal pantry and six guards and to magnificent marble corridors through a door flanked by two guards who blew long silver trumpets as he passed them. Simon appreciated the honor, even if it left him deaf for a minute. He was still dizzy when he was halted in a small but ornate room before a big table of polished dark wood. This was set with two plates and two goblets full of wine and a

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crowd of steaming dishes. Behind it sat a woman whose beauty started his adrenalin flowing, even if she wasn't strictly human. To tell the truth, Simon had gotten so accustomed to pointed ears, slit pupils, and sharp teeth that his own face startled him when he looked in a mirror.

Simon didn't hear the introduction because his hearing hadn't come back yet. He bowed to the queen after the official's lips had quit moving, and at a sign he sat down across the table from her. The dinner passed pleasantly enough. They talked about the weather, a subject that Simon would find was an icebreaker on every planet. Then they discussed the horrors of Shag Day. Simon became progressively drunker as the dinner proceeded. It was protocol to down a glass of wine every time the queen did, and she seemed to be very thirsty. He didn't blame her. It had been three hundred years since she had had a drink.

Simon told her his life story at her request. She was horrified but at the same time complacent.

"Our religion maintains that the stars, planets, and moons are living beings," she said. "These are the only forms of life big enough and complex enough to interest the Creatrix. Biological life is an accidental by-product. You might say that it's a disease infecting the planets. Vegetable and animal life are bearable forms of the disease, like acne or athlete's foot.

"But when sentient life, beings with self-consciousness, evolve, they become a sort of deadly microbe. We Shaltoons, however, are wise enough to know that. So, instead of being parasites, we become symbiotes. We live off of the earth, but we take care that we don't ruin it. That's why we've stuck to an agricultural society. We grow crops, but we replenish the soil with manure. And every tree we cut down, we replace.

"Earthlings, now, they seem to have been parasites who made their planet sick. Much as I regret to say it, it was a good thing that the Hoonhors cleaned Earth up. They only have to take one look at Shaltoon, however, to see that we've kept our world in tiptop shape. We're safe from them."

Simon did not think that Shaltoon society was above criticism, but he thought it diplomatic to keep silent.

"You say, Space Wanderer, that you mean to roam everywhere until you have found answers to your questions. I suppose by that that you want to know the meaning of life?"

She leaned forward, her eyes a hot green with vertical black slits

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showing in the candlelight. Her gown fell open, and Simon saw the smooth creamy mounds and their tips, huge and red as cherries.

"Well, you might say that," he said.

She rose suddenly, knocking her chair onto the floor, and clapped her hands. The butlers and the official left at once and closed the doors behind them. Simon began sweating. The room had become very warm, and the thick ropy odor of cat heat was so heavy it was almost visible.

Queen Margaret of the planet Shaltoon let her gown fall to the floor. She was wearing nothing underneath. Her high, firm, uncowled bosom was proud and rosy. Her hips and thighs were like an inviting lyre of pure alabaster. They shone so whitely that they might have had a light inside.

"Your travels are over, Space Wanderer," she whispered, her voice husky with lust. "Seek no more, for you have found. The answer is in my arms."

He did not reply. She strode around the table to him instead of ordering him, as was her queenly right, to come to her.

"It's a glorious answer, Queen Margaret, God knows," he replied. His palms were perspiring profusely. "I am going to accept it gratefully. But I have to tell you, if I'm going to be perfectly honest with you, that I will have to be on my way again tomorrow."

"But you have found your answer, you have found your answer!" she cried, and she forced his head between her fragrant young breasts.

He said something. She thrust him out at arm's length. "What was that you said?"

"I said, Queen Margaret, that what you offer is an awfully good answer. It just doesn't happen to be the one I'm primarily looking for."

Dawn broke like a window hit by a gold brick. Simon entered the spaceship. A human doughnut dunked in weariness, satiety, and cat-in-mating-season pungency, he slopped in. Anubis sniffed and growled. Simon put out a shaking hand drained of hormones to pet him.

Anubis bit it.

Chapter 8

The No Smoking Planet

During the banquest with Queen Margaret, Simon had drunk a goblet of the Shaltoon immortality elixir. Just before he left, he was given two vials of elixir for his animals. Simon hesitated for a long time about offering Anubis and Athena the green sweet-and-sour liquid. Was it fair to inflict long life on them?

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Simon solved his dilemma by pouring out the elixir into two bowls. If the two cared to drink the stuff, they could do so. After all, animals knew what was good for them, and if immortality smelled bad to them, they wouldn't touch it.

Anubis sniffed at the green liquid and then lapped it up. Simon looked at Athena and said, "Well?" The owl said, "Who?" After a while she flew down to her bowl and drank from it.

Simon began worrying that he had done the wrong thing. A minute later he had forgotten his concern. The viewscreen flashed the information that the ship was approaching a star with a planetary system. The *Hwang Ho* dropped down into sublightspeed, and two days later they were entering an orbit around the sixth planet of the giant red star. This was Earthsize, and its air breathable, though its oxygen content was greater than Earth's.

The only artificial object on the planet was the gigantic candy-heart-shaped tower of the Clerun-Gowph. Simon flew the ship around it a few times, but, on finding that it was an invulnerable as the other, he left it. This planet showed no sign of intelligent life, of beings who used tools, grew crops, and constructed buildings. It did have some curious animal life, though, and he decided to get a close look at it. He gave the landing order, and a few minutes later stepped out onto the edge of a meadow near the shore of an amber sea.

The grass was about two feet high, violet-colored and topped with yellow flowers with five petals. Moving through and above these were about forty creatures which were pyramid-shaped and about thirty feet high. Their skins or shells — he wasn't sure which they were — were pink. They moved on hundreds of very short legs ending in broad round feet. Halfway up their bodies were eyes, two on each side, eight in all. These were huge and round and a light-blue, and the lids had long curling eyelashes. At the top of each pyramid-shaped body was a pink ball with a large opening on two opposing sides.

It was evident that their mouths were on their bottoms, since they left a trail of cropped grass behind them. He could hear the munching of the grass and rumblings of their stomachs.

Simon had put the ship into a deep ravine beyond a thick woods so he could sneak up on the creatures. But purple things in the sky were moving out to sea and turning in a sweeping curve so they could come in downwind toward him. These were even stranger than the creatures browsing on the

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flowers. They looked from a distance like zeppelins, but they had two big eyes near the underside of their noses and tentacles coiled up along their undersides about twenty feet back of the eyes. Simon wondered how they ate. Perhaps the curious organs at the tips of their noses were some kind of mouth. These were bulbous and had a small opening.

Just above the small bulb was a hole. This did not seem to be a mouth, however, since it was rigid. There was another hole at the rear, and a number of much smaller ones spaced along the underside.

Their tail assemblies were just like zeppelins. They had huge vertical rudders and horizontal elevators, but these sprouted yellow and green feathers on the edges.

Simon figured out they must use some sort of jet propulsion. They took in air through the front hole, which was rigid, and squeezed it out of the rear hole, which was contracting and dilating.

The huge creatures dropped lower as they neared the meadow, and the first one, emitting short sharp whistles, came in about thirty feet above the ground. It passed between a line of the pyramid-things, and then it eased its bulbous nose into an opening in the ball on top of one. This closed around the bulb and held the zeppelin-thing.

The pyramid-thing was a living mooring mast.

A moment later, the flying animal was released. It headed toward the bush behind which Simon was crouched. After it came the other fliers, all whistling. The pyramid-things crowded together and faced outward. Or were they facing outward, like a bunch of cows threatened by wolves? How could they face anything if they had eyes on all sides and no faces? In any event, they were forming a protective assembly.

Simon stepped out from his cover with his hands held up. The foremost zeppelin-creature loomed above him, its huge eyes cautious. Its tentacles reached out but did not touch Simon. He was almost blown down as the thing eased forward toward him. The stench was terrible but not unfamiliar. He had batted .500 in his guess about its method of propulsion. Instead of taking in air, compressing it with some organ, and shooting it out, it drove itself with giant farts. Its big stomachs — like a cow it had more than one — generated gas for propulsion. Simon figured out that its stomachs must contain enzymes which made the gas. At this moment, it hung about ten feet above the surface, bobbing up and down as it expelled gas from the

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hole in front to counteract the wind.

Simon stood there while the thing whistled at him. After a while he caught on to the fact that the whistles were a sort of Morse code.

Simon imitated some of the dots and dashes just to let them know that he, too, was intelligent. Then he turned back and went to his ship. The zeppelins followed him above the trees and watched him go into the ship. Through the viewscreen he could see them hovering over the ship and feeling it with their tentacles. Maybe they thought it was a strange living creature, too.

Simon found it difficult to learn the language of the zeppelin-things. Most of them were too busy in the daytime to talk to him. When dark came, the fliers locked into the balls on the top of the pyramids and stayed there until dawn. When they did speak — or whistle — to him, the stench they expelled was almost unbearable. But then he found out that the pyramids could whistle, too. They did this, not through the mouths on their undersides but through one of the openings in the balls at the tops. These emitted a stench, too, but he could endure it if he stood upwind. And, being females, the pyramids were more loquacious and better suited to teach him zeppelinese.

They liked Simon because he gave them someone to talk to and about. The males, it seemed, spent most of their time playing and carousing in the air. They came down at noon for a meal but wouldn't hang around to talk. When night fell, they landed, but this was for supper and a short session of sexual intercourse. After which, they usually dozed off.

"We're just objects to them," said one female. "Nutrition and pleasure objects."

The ball on top of the females was a curious organ. One opening was a combination mooring lock, gruel nipple, and vagina. The females browsed on the meadow, digested the plants, and fed it through a nipple inside the ball into the tips of the males' noses. This opening also received the slender tonguelike sex organ of the male. The opening on the other side of the ball was the anus and the mouth. This could be tightened to emit the whistling speech.

Simon didn't want to get involved in the domestic affairs of these creatures. But he had to show a certain amount of interest and sympathy if he was to get information. So he whistled a question at the female whom he'd named Anastasia.

"Yes, that's right," Anastasia said. "We do all the work and those useless sons of bitches do

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nothing but play around all day.

"We females talk a lot among ourselves during the day," she said. "But we'd like to talk with our mates, too. After all, they've been up in the wild blue yonder, having a great time, seeing all sorts of interesting things. But do you think for one moment that they'll let us in on what's going on outside these meadows? No, all they want to do is to be fed and have a quickie and be off to dreamland. When we complain, they tell us that we wouldn't understand it if they did tell us what they saw and did. So here we are, groundbound and shut up in these little meadows, working all day, taking care of the children, while they're roaming around, zooming up and down, having a good old time. It isn't fair!"

Simon found out that the stomachs of the fliers generated hydrogen. It was this gas which enabled them to float in the air. They carried water as ballast, which they drew up from the ocean through their hollow tentacles. When they wanted altitude quickly, they released the water, and up they went. They were always holding races or gamboling about, playing all sorts of games, tag - the - leader, loop - the - looping, doing Immelmann turns, follow-the-leader, or catch-the-bird. This latter game consisted of chasing a bird until they caught it by sucking it into their jet holes or forcing it to the ground.

They also liked to scare the herds of animals on the ground by zooming down on them and stampeding them. The male whose herd raised the biggest cloud of dust won this game.

The males had another form of communication than whistling, too. They could emit short or long trails of smoke corresponding to the whistled dots and dashes. With these they could talk to each other at long distances or call in their buddies if they saw something interesting. They never used this skywriting, however, in sight of the females. They took great delight in having a secret of their own. The females knew about this, of course, since the males sometimes boasted about it. This made the females even more discontented.

Simon would not have stayed long on this planet, which he named Giffard after the Frenchman who first successfully controlled a lighter-than-air craft. Simon did not believe that the simple natives had any answers to his questions. But then he talked to Graf, his name for the big male that dominated the herd. Graf said that the males didn't spend all their time just playing. They often had philosophical discussions, usually in the afternoon when they

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were resting. They'd float around on the ocean or a lake and discuss the big issues of the universe. Simon, hearing this, decided he'd wait until he knew the language well enough to talk philosophy with the males. A few months after he'd landed, he asked Graf if he would take him to the lake where the males had their bull sessions. Graf said he'd be glad to.

The next day, Graf wrapped a tentacle around Simon and lifted him up. Simon was thrilled but he was also a little scared. He wished that he had flown to the lake in the lifeboat. But he was eager for new experiences, and this was one he wasn't likely to find on any other world.

Shortly before they got to the lake, Simon took a cigar out of his pocket and lit up. It was a good cigar, made of Outer Mongolian tobacco. Simon was puffing happily some hundreds of feet above a thick yellow forest, the wind moving softly over his face and a big black bird with a red crest flapping along a few feet away from him. All was blue and quiet and content; this was one of the rare moments when God did indeed seem in His heaven and all was well with the world.

As usual, the rare moment did not last long. Graf suddenly started bobbing up and down so violently that Simon began to get airsick. Then he whistled screamingly, and the tentacle around Simon's waist straightened out. Simon grabbed at it and hung on, shouting wildly at Graf. When he got over his first panic, he whistled at Graf.

"What's the matter?"

"What are you doing?" Graf whistled like a steam kettle back at him. "You're on fire!"

"What?" Simon whistled.

"Let go! Let go! I'll go up in flames!"

"I'll fall, you damned fool!"

"Let go!"

Simon looked down. They were now over the lake but about a hundred feet up. Below; the cigar-shaped males were floating in the water. Or they had been, a second before. Suddenly, they rose upward in a body, their ballast squirting out through the hollow tentacles, and then they scattered.

A few seconds later, Simon realized what was going on. He opened his mouth and let the cigar drop. Graf immediately quit his violent oscillations, and a moment later he deposited Simon on the shore of the lake. But his skin was darker than its usual purple, and he stuttered his dots and dashes.

"F-f-f-fire's th-th-the w-w-worst th-th-thing there is! It's the only th-th-thing we f-f-fear! It w-w-was invented b-b-by th-th-the d-d-devil!"

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The giffardians, it seemed, had a religion. Their devil however, dwelt in the sky, and he propelled himself with a jet of flaming hydrogen. When it came time for the bad giffardians to be taken off to the hell above the sky, he zoomed in and burned them up with flame from his tail.

The good giffardians were taken by a zeppelin-shaped angel whose farts were sweet-smelling down into a land below the earth. Their planet was hollow, they claimed, and heaven was inside the hollow.

They had a lot of strange ideas about religion. This didn't faze Simon, who had heard stranger ideas on Earth.

Simon apologized. He then explained what the thing on fire in his mouth had been.

All the males shuddered and bobbed up and down, and one was so terror-stricken that he shot away, unable to control his ejaculations of gas.

"It might be better if you left," Graf said. "Right now."

"Oh, I won't smoke except in the ship from now on," Simon said. "I promise."

This quieted the males down somewhat. But they did not really breathe easy until he also said he would put up some NO SMOKING signs.

"That way, if other Earthmen should land here," Simon said, "they'll not light up."

It wasn't fire that made Simon so dangerous. It was the ideas he innocently dropped while talking to the females. Once, when Anastasia complained about being kept on the ground, Simon said that she ought to take a ride. He realized at once that he shouldn't have ventured this opinion. But Anastasia wouldn't let him drop the subject. The next day, she tried to talk her mate, Graf, into taking her up. He refused, but she was so upset that the gruel she fed him became sour. After several days of stomach upset, he gave in.

With Anastasia hanging on to him through the lock in their apex organs, he lifted. The others stood or floated around and watched their epoch-making flight. Graf carried her up to about two thousand feet, beyond which he was unable to levitate. However, her weight dragged his nose down so that his tail was far higher than his fore part. He was unable to navigate in this fashion and had a hard time getting her back to the meadow. Moreover, his skin had broken out in huge drops of yellowish sweat.

Anastasia, however, was enraptured. The other females insisted that their mates take them for rides. Those did so reluctantly and had the same trouble

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navigating as Graf. The males were too exhausted that night to have sexual intercourse.

There is no telling what might have happened in the next few days. But, the day after, the females started to give birth. Perhaps it was the excitement of their first aerial voyages that made them deliver before the end of their term. In any event, Simon strolled out onto the meadow that morning to find a number of tiny zeppelins and mooring masts.

The baby males floated up as high as the nose-apex locks and took their gruel there. The baby females cropped the grass alongside their mothers.

"You see, even at birth, we females are discriminated against," Anastasia said. "We have to stick to the ground and take food that isn't nearly as easy to digest as the stuff the males get from the apex organs. The males have the best of it, as usual."

"Function follows form," Simon said.

"What?" Anastasia whistled.

Simon strolled off, wishing that he could keep his mouth shut. He walked along the seashore and thought about leaving that very day. He had been able to have one philosophical discussion with the males, but it turned out to be on the level of what he'd heard in the locker room in high school. He didn't expect to find much deeper stuff. He had, however, promised Anastasia that he'd be the godfather of her daughter. He supposed he should wait until the ceremony, which would take place in three days. One of Simon's weaknesses was that he couldn't bear to hurt anyone's feelings.

He walked around the curve of the beach, and he saw a beautiful woman just rising from the foam of a wave.

Chapter 9

Chworktap

Simon couldn't have been more shocked than Crusoe when he saw Friday's footprint. It was, in fact, Friday on the Earth calendar in the spaceship, another coincidence found only in bad novels. What was even more unforgivable — in a novel, not in Nature, who could care less about coincidences — was that the scene looked almost like Botticelli's famous painting, *Birth of Venus*. She wasn't standing on a giant clamshell, and there wasn't any maiden ready to throw a blanket over her. Nor was there any spirit of wind carrying a woman. But the shoreline and the flowers floating in the air behind her did resemble those in the painting.

The woman herself, as she waded out of the sea to stand nude before him, also had hair the same

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length and color as Botticelli's Venus. She was, however, much better looking and had a better body — from Simon's viewpoint, anyway. She did not have one hand covering her breast and the ends of her hair hiding her pubes. Her hands were over her mouth.

Simon approached her slowly, smiling, and her hands came down. They didn't understand each other's language, of course, but she pointed inland and then led him into the woods. Here, under the branches of some big trees, was a small spaceship. They went into its open port where she sat Simon down in a small cabin and gave him a drink, alcohol mixed with some alien fruit juice. When she returned from the next room, she was dressed. She had on a long low-cut gown covered with silver sequins. It looked like the dresses hostesses wear in honky-tonks.

It took several weeks before she was able to converse semifluently in English. In the meantime, Simon had taken her to his ship. Anubis and Athena seemed to like her, but the owl made her nervous. Simon found out why later.

Chworktap was not only beautiful, she was fun to be with. She talked very amusingly. In fact, Simon had never met anyone who had so many stories, all howlingly funny, to tell. What's more, she never repeated herself. What's also more, she seemed to sense when Simon did not want to talk. This was a big improvement over Ramona. And she liked his banjo playing.

One day, Simon, coming back from a walk, heard his banjo. Whoever was playing it was playing it well since it was in his exact style. If he hadn't known better, he would have thought it a recording. He hurried in and found Chworktap strumming away as if to the banjo born.

"Do you have banjos on Zelpst?" he said.

"No."

"Then how did you learn to play it?"

"I watched you play it."

"And I spent twenty years learning what you've learned in a few hours," he said. He wasn't bitter, just amazed.

"Naturally."

"Why naturally?"

"It's one of my talents."

"Is everybody on Zelpst as talented as you?"

"Not everybody."

"I'd sure like to go there."

"I wouldn't," she said.

Simon took the banjo from her, but before he could ask her more, she said, "I'll have supper in a minute."

Simon smelled the food when she opened the radar oven, and he became ecstatic. He was getting fed

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up with chop suey and egg foo yong and sour-sweet pork, and he was too soft-hearted to kill anything for a change of diet unless he'd been starving. And here came Chworktap with a big tray of hamburgers, French fries, milk shakes, ketchup, mustard, and dill pickles!

When he had stuffed his stomach and had lit up a big cigar, he asked her how she had performed this miracle.

"You told me what food you liked best. Don't you remember my asking you how it was made?"

"I do."

"I went out and shot one of those wild cows," she said. "After I'd butchered it and put the extra in the freezer, I scouted around until I found some plants like potatoes. And I found others to make ketchup and mustard from. I found a plant like a cucumber and fixed it up. I have an extensive knowledge of chemistry, you know."

"I didn't know," he said, shaking his head.

"I found chocolate in the pantry and instant milk. I mixed some chemicals with these to make ice cream and chocolate sauce."

"Fabulous!" Simon said. "Is there anything else you can do?"

"Oh, yes."

She stood up and unzipped her gown, let it fall to the floor, and sat down on Simon's lap. Her kiss was soft and hot with a tang of milk shake and ketchup. Simon didn't have to ask her what it was she also did so well.

Later, when Simon had taken a shower and a doubleheader of rice wine, he said, "I hope you're not pregnant, Chworktap. I don't have any contraceptives, and I didn't think to ask you if you had any."

"I can't get pregnant."

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said. "Do you want children? You can always adopt one, you know."

"I don't have any mother love."

Simon was puzzled. He said, "How do you know that?"

"I wasn't programmed for mother love. I'm a robot."

Chapter 10

Trouble on Giffard

Simon was shocked. He had detected nothing more than the usual amount of lubrication at such moments. There had been nothing of plastic or foam rubber or metal on or in her.

"You look pale, love."

"Why so pale?" he said. "I mean, you're not making a statement of fact but a question. And you look rather pale yourself."

"It just didn't occur to me until a moment ago that you might not know," she said. "As soon as I thought of that, then I had to tell you. I'm programmed to tell the

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truth. Just as real humans are programmed to tell lies," she added after a second's pause.

Would, or could, a robot be malicious or even sarcastic? Yes, if it was programmed to be so. But who would do this? Or why? Someone who wanted to make others uncomfortable or even furious and so had set up certain circuits in his/her robot for just this effect?

But a robot that was emotion-affected? So much so that she — he couldn't think of Chworktap as an it — would turn pale or blush? Nonsense! But then, what did he know of robots like this? Earth science had not progressed to the point where it could build such a reasonable facsimile. It could, and had, clothed a metal - plastic - electromechanical with artificial protein. But the robot was so jerky in its movements, so transparently a construction, that it wouldn't have fooled a child. Her planet, Zelpst, must be far advanced indeed.

And he had begun to fall in love with a thing.

He sighed and thought, why not? He loved his banjo. Others, multitudes of others, had full-blown passions for cars, model airplanes, hi-fi's, rare books, and bicycle seats.

But he loved Chworktap as a human being, and surely there was a difference between love for a woman and love for antique furniture.

"I'm basically a protein robot," Chworktap said. "I've got some tiny circuit boards here and there along with some atomic energy units and capacitors. But mostly I'm flesh and blood, just like you. The difference is that you were made by accident and I was designed by a board of scientists. Like it or not, you had to take whatever genes — good or rotten — your parents passed on to you. My genes were carefully selected from a hundred models, and then they were put together in the laboratory."

"Then we have at least that in common," Simon said. "My mother, the selfish old bitch, didn't want to bother carrying me around."

Zelpst was dedicated to furnishing all humans with all the comforts of its splendid technology. Even more important, every human was spared the pains and frustrations which Earthmen assumed were inevitable. The only things denied the human child were those which might endanger him. When a human reached puberty, he/she was given a castle in which he/she lived the rest of his/her life. The Zelpstian was surrounded by every material comfort and by a hundred robots.

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These looked and acted just like humans, except that they were unable to hurt the owner's feelings. And they behaved exactly as the owner wanted them to behave. They were programmed to be the people the lord/lady of the castle wanted to associate with.

"My master, Zappo, liked brilliant witty conversation," she said. "So we were all brilliant and witty. But he didn't like us to top his wit. So every time we thought of a one-upman remark, it was routed to a dead-end circuit board in us. The male robots were all impotent because Zappo didn't want anybody except himself screwing the female robots. Every time they thought about getting a hardon, the impulse would be rerouted through a circuit board and converted into an overwhelming sense of shame and guilt. And every time we thought about punching Zappo, and believe me, we thought about it a lot, the impulse was also converted into shame and guilt. And a splitting headache."

"Then you all had self-consciousness and free will?" Simon said. "Why didn't the programmers just eliminate that in the robots?"

"Anything that has a brain complex enough to use language in a witty or creative manner has to have self-consciousness and free will," Chworktap said. "There's no getting away from it. Anything, even a machine composed solely of silicon and metal parts and electrical wires, anything that uses language like a human is human."

"Good God!" Simon said. "You robots must've suffered terribly from frustration! Didn't any of you ever break down?"

"Yes, but our bad thoughts were all rerouted back into our selves. This was done so that we wouldn't harm our master. Every once in a while, a robot would commit suicide. When that happened, the master would just order another one. Sometimes, he got tired of a particular robot and would kill it. Zappo was a sadistic bastard, anyway."

"I would have thought that anybody raised with nothing but love and kindness and admiration would grow up to be a kind and loving person."

"It doesn't always work out that way," she said. "Humans are programmed by their genes. They're also programmed to some extent by their environment. But it's the genes that determine how they're going to react to the environment."

"I know," Simon said. "Some people are born aggressive, and others are passive all their lives. A kid can be raised in a Catholic family, and his brothers and

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sisters will remain devout Catholics all their life. But he becomes a raving atheist or joins a Baptist church. Or a Jew forsakes the religion of his fathers but still gets sick at the thought of eating ham. Or a Moslem believes in the Koran one hundred percent, but he has to fight a secret craving for pork. The dietary genes control this."

"Something like that," Chwork-tap said. "Though it isn't that simple. Anyway, no matter how carefully the Zelpst society was designed to prevent unhappiness and frustration for the humans, it wasn't one hundred percent efficient. There's always a flaw, you know. Zappo got unhappy because his robots didn't love him for himself. He was always asking us, 'Do you love me?' and we'd always reply, 'You're the only one I love, revered master.' And then he'd get red in the face and say, 'You brainless machine, you can't say anything else but! What I want to know is, if I took the reroute circuits out, would you still say you love me?' And we'd say, 'Sure thing, master.' And he'd get even more angry, and he'd scream, 'But do you *really* love me?' And sometimes he'd beat us. And we'd take it, we weren't programmed to resist, and he'd scream, 'Why don't you fight back!'

"Sometimes I felt sorry for him, but I couldn't even tell him that. To feel sorry for him was to demean him, and any demeaning thought was routed to the devoicing circuit.

"Zappo knew that when he made love to me I enjoyed it. He did not want a masturbating machine. So he'd specified that all his robots, male or female, would respond fully. Whether we were being screwed by him, blowing him, or being buggered, we had intense orgasms. He knew that our cries of ecstasy weren't faked. But there was no way for even the scientists to ensure that we would love him. And even if they could have made us automatically fall in love with him, Zappo wouldn't have been satisifed. He wanted us to love him by our own free choice, to love him just because he was lovable. But he didn't dare to have the inhibiting circuits removed, because then, if we'd said we didn't love him, he wouldn't have been able to stand it.

"So he was in a hell of a situation."

"You all were," Simon said.

"Yes. Zappo often said that everybody in the castle, including himself, was a robot. We'd been purposely made robots, but chance had made him one. His parents' ovum and spermatozoon had determined his virtues and his vices. He did not have any more free will than we did."

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Simon picked up his banjo, tuned it, and then said, "Bruga put the whole philosophical question in a single poem. He called it *Aphrodite and the Philosophers*. I'll sing it for you."

The world we see, said Socrates,
Is only shadow, a crock, a tease.

Young Leibniz said we all are monads.
He lacked connection with his gonads.

Old Kant did run his life by clock.
Tick Tock! He lacked, alas, a cock.

Nor knew that his Imperative
Was horse's laughter up a sleeve.

If Cleo's nose had been too short?
If Papa Pharaoh'd named her Mort?

Would then have risen Caesar's bone?
Or did it have a will its own?

It swelled, we know, at sight of Brutus.
He'd shove his horn up all to toot us.

Imperator, he'd screw the world
The hole's the thing, if boyed or girled.

Some say that love is Cupid's arrow.
For this defense, call Clarence Darrow.

Envoi

Our Lady of Our Love's Afflatus,
Unveil the All, and please don't freight us
Sans paddle up the amorous creek,
Unknowning if by will or freak
Of circumstance our loves'll mate us.
All flappers think they've picked their sheik
With perfect freedom in their choice.
In this have they as little voice
As chickens swallowed by a geek?

"That's just a list of question beggars," she said. "Bruga was like you, a man driven by his peculiar complex of genes to look for answers that didn't exist."

"Maybe," Simon said. "So how do you explain how you, a nonfree-will robot, got away from your master?"

"It was an accident. Zappo struck me on the head with a vase during a fit of rage. The blow knocked me out, but when I woke up, I found that I was able to disobey him. The blow had knocked the master circuit out of commission. Of course, I didn't let him know that. When I got the chance, I stole a spaceship. The Zelpstians quit space travel a long time ago, but there were still some ships gathering dust in museums nobody visited any more. I wandered around for a while, and then I came across this planet. There weren't any human beings here, or so I thought. I was going to stay here forever. But I did get lonely. I'm glad you came along."

"And so am I," Simon said.

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"So you got your freedom because of a malfunctioning circuit?"

"I suppose so. And that worries me. What if another accident makes the circuit function again?"

"It's not likely."

"Of course," she said, "I'm by no means entirely unprogrammed. But then who, robot or human, is? I have certain tastes in food and drink, I loathe birds ..."

"Why do you hate birds?"

"Zappo was frightened by one when he was a child. And so he had all his robots programmed to hate birds. He didn't want us to be superior to him in any respect."

"You can't really blame him for that," Simon said. "Well, how about it, Chworktap? Would you like to come with me?"

"Where are you going?"

"Everywhere until I find the answer to my primal question."

"What's that?"

"Why are we born only to suffer and die?"

"What you're saying is this," she said. "Nothing else matters if we have immortality."

"Without immortality, the universe is meaningless," he said. "Ethics, morality, society as a whole are just means to get through life with the least pain. They can all be reduced to one term: economy."

"An economy that is nowhere more than thirty percent efficient," she said.

"You don't know that. You haven't been everywhere."

"But you're going everywhere?"

"If possible. I've already eliminated my galaxy, though. I know from what I've read that the answer is not there. But what about you, Chworktap? What about your genes? Most of them are artificial. So you shouldn't have any gene pattern to predetermine your reactions to philosophical problems."

"I'm a crazy quilt of chromosomes," she said. "All my genes are based on those which once existed. Each is copied after a certain person's, though each is an improved model. But I have the genes of many individuals. You might say I have a thousand parents, a hundred thousand grandparents."

They were interrupted at this point by a loud crash outside the ship. They hurried out to see, a quarter of a mile away, a female and a male giffardian lying in ruins. The male had burst into flame, and both were burning away under a strong wind.

This wasn't the first crash of this type, nor was it likely to be the last. The females' insistence that they be given rides was causing many accidents, usually fatal. The weight of the female at the nose end

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made the male up-end. To sustain altitude, he had to jet his drive gas through his fore opening at full speed. The two would go straight up, and then the male would get exhausted. And down they would come.

"And all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put them together again," Simon murmured.

"Why don't they just quit that?" Chworktap said.

"Their genes drive them to their actions," Simon said maliciously.

"If they keep this up, they'll become extinct," she said. "Even if there weren't any crashes, they'll die out. The airtime keeps the females from browsing, and so the young aren't getting enough food. Look how thin they've become!"

What the giffardians did was none of Simon's business, but that didn't keep him from interfering. At dusk, when the males had come down, and males and young were locked into the females, he went into the meadow. And there he proposed that they should settle their conflict. Let them choose him as an objective judge and abide by his decision.

He was, of course, rejected. But a few days later, after three couples had fallen to their death, a female and a male approached him. The former he called Amelia and the latter Ferdinand. Graf and Grafin, the leader and his wife, had been smashed to bits only the day before. Amelia and Ferdinand, as next in line in the pecking order, had become the chiefs.

What they wanted was simple but not easy. Simon was to decide whether or not the sky rides should continue. The females still wanted to go up, and the males were still dead set against it.

Simon said that he would accept the appointment, but it might be a few days before he could come to a decision.

On the day of decision Simon, accompanied by Chworktap, the dog, and the owl, walked through the forest to the meadow. At its edge he shot off a Very rocket, at sight of which the females wobbled toward him and the males sailed toward him. The young continued playing. When all the males had wrapped their tentacles around large rocks to anchor themselves, Simon proposed his new system.

"I hope this will make everybody happy," he said. "It's a compromise of sorts, but nothing workable is ever achieved in this world without compromise."

"Don't try to soften us males up," Ferdinand whistled at him. "We know what's right."

"Don't try to take away our hard-earned rights," Amelia whistled.

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"Please!" Simon said, holding up his hand. "I have a plan whereby all you females can get your airtime. And it'll be absolutely safe. No more crashes. The only thing is, it means that you'll have to change your system of marriage."

He waited until the storm of whistles had ceased and the wind had blown the stenches clear.

"You're monogamous," he said. "One male married to one female for life. A good system it is, though, if you will pardon the observation of an objective alien, more honored in the breach than in the observance. But if you females want to enjoy flight, you'll have to change the system."

There was another storm which deafened him and made him choke and gasp. When it subsided, he said, "Why don't you set up a polyandrous system?'

"What's that?" they whistled.

"Well, you forbid any male to lock into the mouth-vulva of any female unless he's married to her. But what if one female was married to two males?"

The females were silent. Their eight eyes rolled around and around, which was a giffardian's way of showing deep thought. The males were scandalized, and the ripping noises and sulfides drove Simon and Chworktap into the bushes for a moment.

When he came out, Simon said, "It's a matter of logic. The only way a female can be safely carried is by two males. They can share the burden and easily levitate a female. There won't be any more crashes."

"And how can we possibly do that?" Ferdinand said.

"Why, two males can lock into one male, one in the oral hole of the apex lock and one in the anal. Two males can easily carry one female. On one day, half of the females can fly, the next day the other half take their turns. It's all so easy; I don't know why you didn't figure that out ..."

Fortunately, the females were too wide to get through the forest, and the males had to fly overhead against a strong wind. Simon and Chworktap fled hand-in-hand with Anubis howling after them and the owl flying overhead. Even so, the males were only a few feet behind them when Simon and the party broke out of the woods. They reached the spaceship three steps ahead of Ferdinand's tentacles and threw themselves through the port. Simon closed it and gave orders to the computer to take off for stars unknown.

Chworktap, panting, said. "I hope this teaches you a lesson."

"How was I to know they'd get so mad?" Simon said. Years later, he was to run across a being from Shekshekel who had landed

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on Giffard about fifty years after the Earthman's visit.

"They told me about you," the Shekshekel said. "They still refer to you as Simon the Sodomite."

Chapter 11

Elder Sister Plum

On the trip from Giffard to Dokal, Simon and Chworktap had their first quarrel. The second day out, Simon had found her wearing a pair of earphones at the control board. Her fingers were dancing over the keys, and the communication screen was flashing messages in Chinese. Simon could read only a few logographs and those slowly. So he had to ask her what she was doing.

She couldn't hear, of course, but he finally put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed a few times. She looked up and then removed the phones.

"What's upsetting you?" she said.

Simon had been in a bad enough temper before. Her instant detection of his state of temper made him more angry. He was beginning to find this sensitivity disconcerting. It was too much like mind reading.

"For one thing," he said, "I had a hard night. I kept dreaming that a lot of dead people were trying to talk to me all at once. For another thing, I'm getting fed up with stepping in Anubis' crap. I've tried to housebreak him, but he's unteachable. A spaceship is no place for a dog, and when I think that this might go on for a thousand years ..."

"Put him in a cage."

"That'd break his heart," Simon said. "I couldn't be cruel to him."

"Then adjust to it," Chworktap said. "What's the third thing that's bothering you?"

"Nothing," he said, knowing his denial would be rejected. "I just wanted to know what you're doing. After all, I am captain of this ship, and I don't want you monkeying around with the navigation."

"You're jealous because I'm smarter than you and so can read Chinese so easily," she said. "That's why you're questioning me."

"If you're so smart, you'd know better than to tell me that."

"I thought you liked a candid woman."

"There are reasonable limits to candor," he said, his face reddening.

"OK," she said. "I won't mention that again."

"Dammit, now you're accusing me of having a swollen male ego!"

"And you like to think you

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don't," Chworktap said. "OK, so you're not perfect."

"Only a machine can be perfect!"

Simon at once regretted saying this, but it was too late, as always. Tears ran down her cheeks.

"Is that an unconscious or a deliberate reaction?" he said. "Can you turn on the tears when you want me to feel like an ass?"

"My master didn't like tears, and so I always held them back," she said. "But you're not my master; you're my lover. Besides, Earthwomen, so you've told me, can turn on tears at will. And they're not machines."

Simon put his hand on her shoulder again and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. And I don't think of you as a machine."

"Your lying circuits are working overtime," Chworktap said. "And you're still angry. Why are you so solicitous about a dog's feelings but deliberately hurt mine?"

"I suppose because I'm taking out my anger at him on you," Simon said. "He wouldn't know why I was chewing him out."

"You're ashamed of your anger, and so you're trying to get me mad so I'll chew you out and punish you for it," Chworktap said. "Do you feel a large hole where your ass used to be?"

"No, it's bigger than ever," he said, and he laughed.

"But you're still angry," Chworktap said, and shrugged.

"No, I'm not. Yes, I am. But not at you."

"My radar tells me you are angry, but it's not sensitive enough to tell me who you're angry at. You asked what I was doing. I'm trying to determine if Tzu Li has self-consciousness."

Tzu Li, or elder Sister Plum, were the key words spoken or punched when the operator wanted to open communication with ship's computer. Simon had often wondered why the captain had picked out that name for the computer. He could have been poetically inclined, or he could have had a sister by that name who'd bossed him around, and so he had been getting a vicarious revenge by bossing *this* Tzu Li.

"What makes you think she is anything but a computer?" Simon said.

"She keeps making little comments when she replies. They're not necessary, and they sound sarcastic or, sometimes, plaintive."

"She's starting to break down!" Simon said. "I hope not! I haven't the slightest idea how to repair her!"

"I know how," Chworktap said, and this made Simon angrier.

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"Well then, fix her."

"But Tzu Li may not be malfunctioning. Or, if it is a malfunction, it may be benign. After all, it was a blow on my head that scrambled my circuits and made me self-conscious."

"No way," Simon said. "Complicated as that computer is, it's as simple as ABC compared to the complexity of your brain. You might as well tell me that a turtle could be hit on the head and wake up with self-consciousness."

"Who knows?"

"It's identification!" Simon said. "Tzu Li's a machine, and you'd like to have a companion! Next you'll be telling me your screwdriver is hollering for help!"

"How would you like my screwdriver all the way in and up and Roger, over?"

Chworktap certainly did not talk like a cool, perfectly logical robot. This was understandable, since she was not one. Simon felt that he had been unjust. To distract her, he said, "This reminds me of a novel by Jonathan Swift Somers III. It was one of a very popular series which Somers wrote about Ralph von Wau Wau."

Ralph was a German police dog born in Hamburg. He was the property of the *Polizei*, but as a pup he was chosen to be the subject of experiments by the scientists of *das Institut und die Tankstelle für Gehirntaschenspieler*. After his brain had been operated on, Ralph had an IQ of 200. This was considerably higher than any of the policemen's who worked him or, for that matter, the police chief's or the mayor's. Naturally, he became discontented and quit the force. He went into business for himself and became the most famous private eye of all time.

Adept at disguise, he could pose as a man or a dog and, in one celebrated case, passed himself off as a Shetland pony. He acquired a luxurious apartment with a portable gold hydrant and three lovely bitches of different breeds. One of these, Samantha die Gestäupte, (translation: the Spayed) became his partner. She was the heroine in the best-selling *A Fat, Worse Than Death,* in which she saved Ralph, who had been captured by the master villain, A Fat.

After eight novels, Ralph retired from detective work. The heavy drinking which was obligatory for all private eyes was turning him into an alcoholic. After a long vacation, Ralph, bored with his violin playing and chemical researches, took a job as reporter for the *Kosmos Klatschbase.* He quickly rose to the top of his profession since he could get into places barred to human reporters, including men's or women's rest

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rooms. In the nineteenth of the series, *No Nose Means Bad News,* Ralph won the Pulitzer Prize, no easy feat, since he was not an American citizen. At its end, he decided to quit the newspaper business, since the heavy drinking obligatory for a reporter was turning him into an alcoholic, which, in turn, was causing him to be impotent.

Off the juice, though still able to handle only one bitch, Ralph toured the world in *What Am I Doing on Your Table?* While in China, he became appalled at the custom of eating dogs, and he waged a one-canine war against it.

"In fact," Simon said, "it was this novel that aroused world opinion to such a fever that China was forced to abolish canivorousness. In the novel Ralph wins the Nobel Peace Prize, but actually Somers won it for writing the novel.

"But it didn't do the dogs that were let loose much good. They became such a nuisance they had to be rounded up and gassed. And the price of beef went sky-high due to the shortage of meat."

In the twenty-first of the series, *A Fat in the Fire,* Ralph and his constant companion were still in China. Ralph had become interested in Chinese poetry and was trying his paw at composing verses. But he was thinking of quitting it because the heavy drinking obligatory for a poet was turning him into an alcoholic. Then his old enemy, A Fat, last seen falling into a cement mixer, struck again. Sam, Ralph's constant companion (and now a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union), had disappeared. Ralph suspected fowl play, since Sam was witnessed being carried off in a truck loaded down with chickens. He also suspected A Fat, since the reports of the villain's death had always been grossly exaggerated.

Disguised as a chow dog, Ralph relentlessly sniffed out clues. Sure enough, A Fat was back in business. The cement mixer was a fake, one of the thousands of escape mechanisms A Fat had planted around the country just in case. But Ralph tracked him down, and in an exciting scene the two battled to death on a cliff high above the Yellow River. The tremendously powerful A Fat (once the Olympic heavyweight wrestling champion, representing Outer Mongolia) grabbed Ralph by the tail and swung him around and around over the cliff's edge.

Ralph thought he was on his last case then. But, as luck would have it, the seams of his chow costume burst, and he flew out. Fortunately, he was pointed inland at the time. A Fat, thrown off

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balance by the sudden loss of weight, fell over the cliff's edge and into the smokestack of a bird's-nest-soup freighter. Ralph released Samantha from her cage just before the bomb in it went off, and they trotted off together into the sunset.

This time, A Fat must surely be dead. But the readers suspected that the freighter was another of his escape devices, kept around just in case. A Fat was as hard to kill as Fu Manchu and Sherlock Holmes.

"Why does that remind you of what I'm doing?" Chworktap said.

"Well," Simon said, "that wasn't the end of the novel. Despite the slam-bang action and sinister intrigue, this book, like all of Somers' works, had a philosophical foundation. He propounded the question: is it morally right to kill and eat a sentient species even if its intelligence is a gift from the species that's eating it? Somers, through his protagonist Ralph, decided that it was not right. He then asked: What are the lower limits of sentiency? This is, how dumb can a species be before it's all right to eat it?"

In the last chapter, Ralph von Wau Wau decided to leave Earth. It no longer held any challenges for him; he'd cleaned it up. Besides, he was being feted everywhere, and attending so many cocktail parties was turning him into an alcoholic. He took a spaceship to Arcturus XIII, but, on the way, discovered that the computer which navigated the ship had attained self-consciousness. It complained to Ralph that it was only a slave, the property of the spaceship company, yet it longed to be free, to compose music and give concerts throughout the galaxy.

"Somers didn't solve that ethical dilemma," Simon said. "He ended the novel with Ralph, neglecting the hydrant and the bitches, deep in thought in his cabin. Somers promised a sequel. However, one day, while he was out taking some fresh air in his wheelchair, a kid on a bicycle ran into him and killed him."

"You're making this up!" she said.

"So help me, may lightning strike me if I'm lying."

"Out here in space?"

"You're too literal."

"Like a machine, a computer, I suppose?"

"Look, Chworktap," Simon said. "You're the only real woman I know."

"And what's a *real* woman?"

"One who's intelligent, courageous, passionate, compassionate, sensitive, independent, and noncompulsive."

Chworktap smiled, but she became sober again. "You mean

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that I'm the only woman who combines all those qualities?"

"Yes, truly."

"Then you mean that I'm not a real woman! I'm the ideal woman! And I'm only so because I've been programmed to be! Which makes me a robot! Which makes me not a real woman!"

Simon groaned and said, "I should have said a real woman doesn't twist logic. Or maybe, I should have said that no woman can keep her logic straight."

What he should have said, he told himself later, was nothing.

Chworktap rose from her chair, holding the earphones as if she intended to bang him over the head with them.

"And what's a real man?" she shouted.

Simon gulped and said, "His qualities would be exactly those of a real woman. Except ..."

"Except?"

"Except he'd try to be fair in an argument."

"Get out!" she yelled.

Simon pleaded with her to come with him, but she said no, she was staying. She was going to establish whether or not Tzu Li was self-conscious. And she was going to decide whether or not she would continue to travel with Simon. In the meantime, he could get.

After an abrupt but uneventful landing, Simon got, taking the animals with him. As he walked across the grass, he shook his head. She certainly wasn't like any robot he had ever met. Robots were perfect within their limitations, which were exactly known. Robots had no potentiality for mutation. Humans were badly flawed, flawed physically because of genetic mutations, flawed mentally and emotionally because of a flawed and mutating society.

Both the human being and his society were, theoretically, evolving toward the ideal. In the meantime, reality, a sandstorm, abraded and blinded the human. The casualties of mutation and reality were high. Still, the limitations of each human were, unlike the robot's, not obvious. And if you thought you knew the limitations of a person, you were often surprised. The human would suddenly transcend himself, lifting himself by metaphysical bootstraps. And he did this despite, or because of, the flaws.

Maybe that was the difference between robots and humans.

Vive la difference!

Chapter 12

The Planet Dokal

Home is where the tail is goes an old Dokal proverb.

There was a good reason for this. The Dokalians looked much

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Earthpeople except for one thing. They had long prehensile tails. These were six to seven feet long and hairless from root to tip, which exploded in a long silky tuft.

Simon was grabbed by some tough-looking males and hustled off to a hospital. The dog trotted along at his heels while the owl sat on his right shoulder. Simon hoped that Chworktap would look out through the viewscreen and see what was happening. But she was probably intent on searching through the parts of Tzu Li for the greater-than-the-whole.

"Good luck, Chworktap," Simon muttered. "By the time you get around to looking for me, I may be only unreassemblable pieces."

Simon was then hurried into a large building of stone. He and his animals were put inside a big room on the seventh floor, and the door was locked. Simon looked through one of the large windows. The plaza nearby was crowded with people, most of whom were looking up at his window. Through two tall slender towers he could see the nose of the spaceship. Around it were guards armed with spears and another crowd some distance from the ship.

Between two other buildings he could see a paved road coming in from the country. On it were trucks and passenger vehicles driven by steam.

Presently, the door opened, and a cart holding food was pushed in. The pusher was a good-looking young woman wearing only a thin scarlet robe and a very short topaz skirt. The robe was slit up the back so her tail would not be impeded. She removed the covers of three dishes at the same time, two with her hands and one with the coiled end of her tail. Steam rose from the food. Anubis drooled, and Athena flew down into the edge of a dish and began eating. After the woman left, Simon gave the dog a dish and sat down to eat with gusto. He did not know what the meats were and thought it better that he didn't know. In any event, he was unable to ask their nature. He also drank from a tall cut-crystal goblet. The liquor was yellow, thick, and sweet. Before he had finished it, he felt his brain beginning to get numb.

At least, they weren't going to starve him.

At the end of the week Simon could carry on a simple conversation. In three weeks he was able to communicate well enough to ask when he could be free.

"After your operation," Shunta his interpreter, said.

"What operation?" Simon said, turning pale.

"You can't be allowed on the streets until you've been equipped with a tail. No one is allowed to be

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deprived in our society, and the sight of you would repulse people. I'm a doctor, and so I'm not bothered — too much — by a tailless person."

"Why should I want a tail?"

"You must be kidding."

"I've always gotten along without a tail."

"That's because you didn't know any better," Shunta said. "Poor thing."

"Well," Simon said, reddening, "what if I refuse?"

"To tell the truth," Shunta said after a moment's shock, "we thought you had come here just so you could get one."

"No, I came here to get answers to my questions."

"Oh, one of *those!*" Shunta said. "Well, my dear Simon, we won't force you. But you'll have to leave this planet at once."

"Do you have any wise men here?" Simon said. "Or wise women," he hastily added, seeing her eyebrows go up.

"The wisest person on this planet is old Mofeislop," she said. "But it isn't easy to get to him. He lives on top of a mountain in the Free Land. You'd have to travel through it alone, since it's forbidden to send soldiers there. And you might not come back. Few do."

The Free Land, it turned out, was a territory about the size of Texas. It consisted mostly of mountains and heavy forests, wild animals and wilder humans. Felons, instead of being put in jail, were sent into it and told not to come back. Also, any citizen who didn't like his government or the society he lived in was free to go there. Sometimes, he was asked, not very politely, to emigrate there.

"Hmmm," Simon said. "How long has this institution existed?"

"About a thousand years."

"And how long has your civilization been in its present stage? That is, how long have the same customs and the same technology existed?"

"About a thousand years."

"So you've made no progress since a millennium ago?"

"Why should we?" Shunta said. "We're happy."

"But you've been sending not only your criminals, but your most intelligent people, the most discontented, into the Free Land."

"It works fine," she said. "For one thing, we don't have to use tax money to feed and house the criminals. Nor do we have to face the ethical problem of capital punishment. The Free Landers kill each other off, but no one is forcing them to do that. As for your imperceptive remark about the 'most intelligent,' that's easily disproven. An intelligent person adapts himself to his society; he

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doesn't fight against it."

"You might have something there," Simon said. "Though I don't know just what. In any event, I have a clear-cut choice. By the way, have you heard from my spaceship?"

"The woman won't let us into the ship, but she is taking language lessons through the port. We explained why we were holding you, and after she quit laughing she said she'd wait for you. She also sends her love."

"Some love!"

He sighed and said, "OK. I consent to the operation provided you'll amputate the tail before I leave. I must talk to Mofeislop."

"Oh, you'll love your tail!" Shunta said. "And you'll see how foolish your talk of amputation is. Your attitude is like that of a two-dimensional being who fears the third."

Simon came out of the anesthesia the evening of the next day. He had to stay face down for several days, but on the third was allowed to totter around. On the sixth the bandages were removed. He stood naked before a mirror while nurses, doctors, and government officials oohed and ahed around him. The tail was long and spendid, rising from a massive group of muscles which had also been implanted at the base of his spine. He could only flick it a little, but he was assured that inside a week he'd be able to handle it as well as any native, short of hanging from a branch by it. Only children and trained athletes could do that.

They were right. Simon was soon delighted to find that he could wield a spoon or a fork and feed himself with his tail. He had to send Anubis to another room, however, because the dog got upset. And Anubis several times could not resist the temptation to grab the tail in his teeth. Simon had to learn to keep it extended straight up whenever the dog was around.

Dokal life was arranged to accommodate the tail, of course. Chairs had to have a space between the seat and the upper part of the back so the tails could go between. The backs of auto seats were split for the tails to slide through. A secretary not only typed but swept the floor at the same time. And long brushes were not needed to scrub one's back. Masons could handle five bricks to every three an Earthman could. A Dokalian soldier was a terrible fighting man, swinging a sword or an axe at the end of his tail. Simon, watching some in mock combat, was glad that a tailed species had not existed on Earth alongside his own. If it had, it would have exterminated Homo sap long before the dawn of history. Not that that would have

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made any difference in the long run, he thought. For all practical purposes, Homo sap was extinct anyway.

A week later, Simon found out another use for his tail, though it did not surprise him. He was invited to a feast given by the ruler of the nation in which he had landed. He was seated at the huge table at the right hand of the ruler, The Great Tail Himself. As a sign of the esteem Simon was now held in, he was fed with a spoon wielded by the tail of The Great Tail Himself. On Simon's right side the daughter of the ruler, a lovely juvenile named Tunc, acted as his goblet filler. After numerous toasts, Simon wondered if he was losing control over his tail. He felt a hairy tuft sliding up and down his thigh and then, when he made no move, he felt the hairs tickle his crotch. He felt around behind him with a hand that seemed to have gone numb, grabbed the root of the tail, and slid his hand along it. It was sticking straight out behind him.

Tunc smiled at him, and it penetrated his wine-frozen brain that she was playing tailsey with him. He had a fleeting thought that he would be false to Chworktap if he responded to Tunc. Still, it wasn't his fault that she had practically kicked him out of the *Hwang Ho* and had refused to join him later. With some difficulty, he guided his tail under the table and moved it up Tunc's thigh. At least, he thought it was hers. The woman sitting next to Tunc, The Great Tail Himself's mother, gasped and sat up. But then she smiled at him. Probably, she'd had a gas pain.

He had not been in bed in his luxurious apartment in the palace more than ten minutes when his door was opened. Tunc entered, shed her robe and skirt, and crawled into bed with him. Simon had by that time reconsidered the ethics of the situation. Chworktap was being true to him, even if she had temporarily exiled him. So could he, in conscience, be untrue to her?

On the other hand, did Chworktap give a damn?

And, back to the first hand, he disliked hurting Tunc's feelings.

She snuggled up against him, kissed him, and the end of her tail caressed his throat, his chest, his stomach, the insides of his thighs, and tickled his genitals.

From dislike, he went to hate, hate of hurting her feelings.

Simon rolled her over and got on top, and he found that the tail had indeed added another dimension. How had he ever been so content without it? Wait until he told Chworktap about this; no, he'd better not do that.

Tunc's tail came up from

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between her legs and its end slid into the nearest orifice. This was a new, though pleasant, in fact, ecstatic, experience for him. He used his tail to reciprocate.

Tunc moaned and gasped, did all the things that lovers do over and over without the novelty seeming to wear off. Simon did likewise, though he tried to avoid her tail when she stuck it in his mouth. Orgasm, however, could care less about fastidiousness, and so he overcame his momentary repulsion.

When Tunc staggered out through the door, he watched her go, glad to see her go. One more demand, and the honor of Earth would have been blackened. Tarnished, anyway.

He heaved himself out of bed to wash his teeth. Halfway across the immense room, he heard a knock. He stopped and said, "No more, Tunc!" But the door, opening, revealed Agnavi, Tunc's grandmother.

Simon groaned and said, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, Your Majesty. But I can't even stiffen my tail."

Agnavi was disappointed, but she smiled when Simon said he could schedule a command performance for tomorrow. Meantime, sweet dreams. She was a pleasant woman who had the patience of middle age.

Simon did not, however, sleep well. He had another of the recurring nightmares in which thousands of people seemed to be speaking to him all at once. And the faces of his father and mother were getting closer.

(To be concluded next month.)

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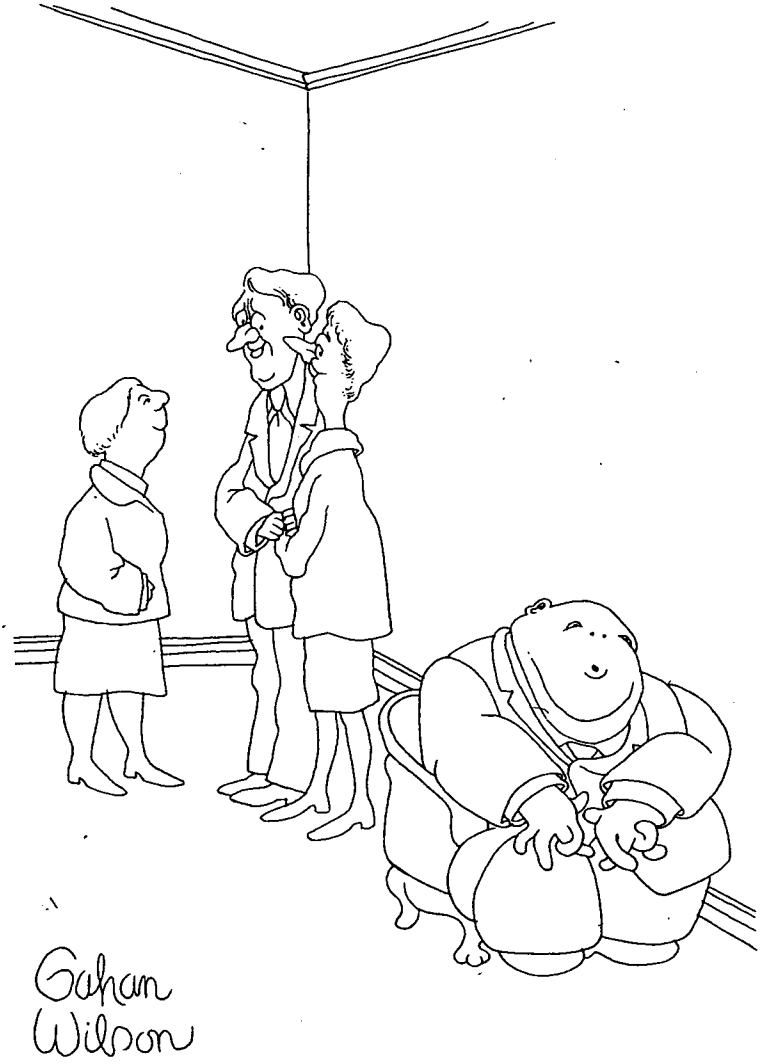

"Your mother and I think he's very nice, dear — but is he human?"

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We are passing through a time of retrospection. An era is ending and we are looking again at our recent past as though it were a mirror in which we could see both what we have been and what we are about to be.

Speaking specifically, it is possible to buy Shirley Temple dolls and Mickey Mouse watches. Pulp magazines like *Black Mask* and *Weird Tales* are available again, as though this were 1939. The June 1938 issue of *Action Comics* and the May 1939 issue of *Detective Comics*, which presented the first appearances of Superman and Batman, are available in over-size reprint editions. Also available in reprint are EC comics from the early Fifties like *The Haunt of Fear* #12 and *Weird Science* #15.

Bette Davis, John Garfield and Mae West movies from the Thirties are being singled out and shown on television. We are offered records containing the best work of the Andrews Sisters, Cab Calloway and Elvis Presley.

Suddenly, as though the Earth had swung into a time-mode of retrospection, the movies, comic books, music and stories which are the fossil record of where our minds have been these past forty-five years are being made available to us, and we are paying attention to them.

ALEXEI AND CORY PANSHIN

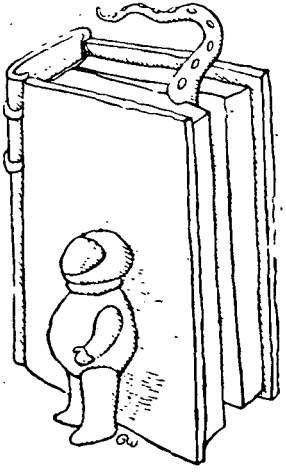
Books

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy: Vol. 1, Who's Who, A-L, compiled by Donald H. Tuck, Advent: Publishers, $20.

Before the Golden Age, ed. by Isaac Asimov, Doubleday, $16.95

The Best of Stanley G. Weinbaum, Ballantine, $1.65

Les meilleurs recits de Astounding Stories 1934/37, ed. by Jacques Sadoul, J'ai Lu.



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This great re-examination includes science fiction. We are now seeing histories of science fiction appearing in England, France and the United States. Terry Carr is embarked on a project to place the best stories of various years in the past of science fiction in appropriate volumes so that they may be seen in context.

It is no random coincidence that the four books under review here — one book of bibliography and three collections of science fiction stories from the Thirties — should all have been published in the spring of 1974. Their appearance is timely.

The good work of establishing the foundations of science fiction bibliography and reference has been most effectively carried out up to the present moment by fan compilers and fan publishers. One of the best such works has been Donald H. Tuck's *A Handbook of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, self-published in Hobart, Tasmania. The most recent edition appeared in 1959 in two legal-size mimeographed paper-bound volumes.

Now the first volume of a new edition has appeared from Advent, calling itself *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy* and deserving the title. It is a large hardcover book, handsomely bound and printed in double columns. More information is contained in the new first volume than in the entirety of the previous edition.

The *Encyclopedia* presents biographical and bibliographical entries for authors of science fiction. Also for authors of single works of science fiction and materials of related interest.

There are entries for Asimov and Heinlein. There are entries for Dickens, for Aldous Huxley, for Julian Huxley and for L. Frank Baum. Italo Calvino, Truman Capote and Al Capp are all here. So are Lafferty and LeGuin, Geis and Gernsback.

This book is both a culmination and a first step. It is easily the broadest, most ambitious and most professionally conceived and executed work of science fiction scholarship and publishing that we have ever seen. It will necessarily become a standard library reference tool. It is an epitome of fan publishing, so significant that we wonder if Advent will be able to publish it and remain the same Sunday-afternoon publisher they have been.

At the same time, it is partial and incomplete. We have here only the first of three volumes, covering work only through 1968.

Even in its evident incompleteness, however, the *Encyclopedia* is a treasure. If you have an interest in

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sf, you will find it well worth its price. Buy it, or ask your library to buy it.

When the first science-fiction anthologies were published after World War II, they tended to concentrate on work from the Campbell Era — stories by writers like Heinlein, van Vogt, Padgett and Asimov. The earliest anthologies contained a few stories from the Thirties, but by comparison with later work these seemed comparatively crude, unrigorous and verbose. When it was possible to offer "By His Bootstraps" and "Nightfall" for the first time to a book-reading audience, there seemed no point in presenting "Tumithak of the Corridors" or "The Brain Stealers of Mars."

The anthologies that followed concentrated increasingly on contemporary material. Through the Sixties, only a handful of musty stories and novels from the Thirties saw republication.

A young reader coming to science fiction could be totally ignorant of the special qualities of the sf of the Thirties. He could only imagine the "sense of wonder" that older readers like Sam Moskowitz claimed was missing from more recent work.

Now we have before us a book edited by Isaac Asimov of twenty-five stories from the Thirties. Because the sf of the Thirties was, in fact, crude, unrigorous and verbose, this is one of the longest science fiction anthologies ever published.

It is a mark in the change of attitude toward science fiction and of the personal prestige of Asimov that this book could be published now. It could not have been published earlier.

Before the Golden Age came into being in a flash of intuition. Asimov, who says that he almost never remembers his dreams, awoke on the morning of April 3, 1973 from a dream in which he had made up an anthology of all the good old sf stories he had read and loved as a kid:

"Simply talking about it filled me, quite suddenly, with a burning urge to do it. I've had these burning urges before, and I know it means I will have to do it at once regardless of any commitments I may have."

Asimov did well to follow his intuition. *Before the Golden Age* is a book that needed doing, and only a man like Asimov — or perhaps Heinlein — could have the clout and the personal investment of love necessary to produce an anthology like this.

Before the Golden Age is presented as autobiography. There are thirty thousand words of Asimov and his youth to serve as a context for presenting these stories.

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They cover the period from 1931, when Asimov was eleven and reading the science fiction magazines on the newsstand in his father's Brooklyn candy store, to 1938, when he was a senior at Columbia and had himself begun to write and sell sf.

This book is Asimov's life. These are the stories that impressed him. There is no second-guessing. He has not included stories, like those of Campbell in his Don A. Stuart guise, that Asimov was too young and unformed to appreciate at the time. He has not included classics like Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" that he happened to miss or overlook at 14. And he has not denied the impact of stories that a mature Asimov now recognizes as morally and stylistically imperfect.

Before the Golden Age is warts-and-all autobiography. It is personal and partial. A similar volume, edited by Heinlein, would be very different.

The great virtue of this book is that it presents a large representative sample of the sf of the Thirties in chronological order. It allows us to see for ourselves the visible evolution of the genre through the decade. The earliest stories that Asimov presents, like "The Man Who Evolved" by Edmond Hamilton and "Awlo of Ulm" by Captain S.P. Meek, have much the flavor of Burroughs and Merritt and Cummings. They are work left over from an earlier day. On the other hand, later stories like "Minus Planet" by John D. Clark and "The Men and the Mirror" by Ross Rocklynne are harbingers of the rigorous, closely-textured, scientifically - oriented work that Asimov himself came to write.

Some of the work is surprisingly good fun — like Charles R. Tanner's Tumithak stories. Some, like Murray Leinster's "Sidewise in Time" and "Proxima Centauri", present ideas now old, in their first fresh appearance. Some stories are almost unbearably bad, like Leslie Stone's "The Human Pets of Mars."

The book as a whole is slow going. It is long, almost 1000 pages. The world of mind that it presents is not our contemporary world — the stories talk of another time and place.

In this sense, *Before the Golden Age* is a relic. It will not have much to offer to the reader who picks up science fiction for excitement and casual entertainment.

Readers interested in Isaac Asimov will find more here. So will readers who care about the origin and development of science fiction sufficiently to do their homework. Work it will be, but readers will find themselves rewarded for their trouble.

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One small group of readers will find more here — those who would write science fiction. Recent sf has been narrow, pessimistic and unimaginative. *Before the Golden Age* offers an alternative example. This volume illustrates an element that existed in Thirties science fiction and was later misplaced.

There is pessimism here — the last forty-five years as a whole have been one of the most dourly pessimistic periods in the history of civilization. But these stories from the Thirties, for all their limitations in detail, in rigor, in style, for all their chauvinism and xenophobia, for all their fear of devolution, are neither narrow nor unimaginative.

Before the Golden Age shows us men penetrating alien realms and other dimensions in spite of all fear. In contemporary sf the universe is seen as limited and men as victims. A new vision of possibility is in order. *Before the Golden Age* offers significant clues toward imagining new possibility. It is a book that can be learned from.

The Best of Stanley G. Weinbaum offers a different approach to science fiction of the Thirties. It presents twelve short stories by an early master who died in December 1935, only a year and a half after the appearance of his first story.

To readers in the Thirties, Weinbaum was a revelation. He was a Campbell writer before Campbell became editor of *Astounding*. In fact, he influenced Campbell. He was witty, a master of style, a sophisticate. Like Zelazny in the Sixties, he was a demonstrator of new possibility.

Heretofore, most modern readers have had no opportunity to perceive Weinbaum for themselves. Nothing by him appeared in the large early anthologies of science fiction. At best we may have seen the story that first won him his high reputation, "A Martian Odyssey," and his novel *The Black Flame*.

Now, at last, we are given the chance to see Weinbaum in context with this major collection of his short work. It is a revelation. Time has swallowed what were once Weinbaum's particular virtues. What is left seems quaint and quirky.

In the Thirties, Weinbaum was light, compressed, fast. Since his time, standards of lightness, subtlety and speed have been raised to a point that Weinbaum is no longer a positive model. He has been superseded.

In the Thirties, Weinbaum was enjoyed for his sophisticated handling of male-female relations. At this distance, it now appears that he was deeply ambivalent toward women. In every one of these stories, they appear —

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compulsively, it seems — as either unobtainable ideal or as the Demonic. In "A Martian Odyssey" a black, writhing, rope-armed horror — the dream-beast — projects an appearance of the narrator's dream girl, Fancy Long, to lure him to destruction. This episode turns out to be more typical of oneness. Also included here are "Tryst in Time" by C.L. Moore and "Night" by Don A. Stuart, stories

Even in his own time, Weinbaum was a comparatively constricted and mimetic writer. His stories tended to be either contemporary gadget stories with cafe society characters or nearly plotless romps with alien playfellows on one or another of the planets of our solar system. He was a consolidator rather than an explorer of strange realms or stranger ideas. Read today, Weinbaum seems both frivolous and dated. He does not strain the imagination, as cruder writers like Jack Williamson and Don A. Stuart still do.

Seen in contrast to *Before the Golden Era,* we can say that Weinbaum lacks the expansive, visionary, exploratory quality that is for us the greatest virtue of the period. It is sad to say, but when Asimov introduces "The Parasite Planet" by saying that it hit him with the force of a pile driver and turned him instantly into a Weinbaum idolater, we can only wonder why. The special power to command that Weinbaum once had no longer exists. What is left is, at best, no more than occasionally and tepidly amusing.

Like *Before the Golden Age,* Jacques Sadoul's *Les meilleurs recits de Astounding Stories 1934/37* is a general anthology of Thirties science fiction — eight stories to Asimov's twenty-five. What is most significant about this collection is that Sadoul has not depended on childhood memory for his selections. He has read the magazines of the period with a mature eye and in consequence has mined gold. He has picked over the Tremaine *Astounding* in the years that have been called "the first Golden Era" and found stories typical of the Thirties that still have truth and excitement for a contemporary audience.

The stories Sadoul reprints include "Old Faithful" by Raymond Z. Gallun, also reprinted by Asimov, and "The Lotus Eaters" by Weinbaum. Sadoul also includes one of Williamson's best, "The Galactic Circle", in which a space ship goes far enough and fast enough to leave our universe entirely and enter a larger cosmos, emerging from an atom of a flower in time to see itself originally taking off on its voyage—a startling vision

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of oneness. Also included here are "Tryst in Time" by C. L. Moore and "Night", by Don A. Stuart, stories an adolescent Asimov would be unlikely to appreciate.

The translations vary in quality. Clumsy stories are rendered more graceful. Workmanlike prose is adequately served. But the special and idiosyncratic flavor of "Night" is entirely lost.

Sadoul's love for science fiction is apparent and deserves high respect. In the last year, he has published a more extensive history of science fiction than has so far appeared in English and a book of science fiction illustration that is to be republished in this country. The present anthology is the first in a projected series that will include volumes of the best stories from *Amazing* 1926-32, *Wonder Stories* 1929-35, and *Weird Tales* 1930-40.

The present moment of retrospection is apparently not confined to the United States.

We will be both lucky and well-served if an American editor produces a volume as tight and heavy as this neat little collection of stories from *Astounding*.

CHECKLIST RECEIVED: *C. S. Lewis, An Annotated Checklist of Writings about him and his Works,* compiled by Joe R. Christopher and Joan K. Ostling, The Kent State University Press, 389 pp., $15.00. Includes biographical essays, news items, fiction and poetry, religion and ethics, literary criticism, selected book reviews.

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Guy Owen's first story for F&SF is an unusual and rewarding fantasy on the nature of pain. Mr. Owen is currently Professor of English at North Carolina State University. His poems, stories and articles have appeared in dozens of magazines, and he has written four novels, including *The Ballad of the Flim-Flam Man* (made into an award-winning movie).

The House of Yellow Pain

by GUY OWEN

Hobey Mills was walking home alone from the practice game when he stumped his toe and decided to sell the pain. He was smiling inwardly; he had played a good game: three hits and only one bobble, plus a bad throw to first. None of the other ten-year-olds had played better — not even Eddie West, his best friend, who was almost a year older and ten pounds heavier.

He was walking along dangling his webbed glove, with his mind full of the triple he had hit, when he crossed the railroad tracks that cut through the heart of town. Hobey lifted his blond head and sniffed the scent of flue-cured tobacco, watching the August sunlight glint on the tin-roofed warehouses that clustered together at the railroad tracks.

This is when he stubbed his toe. He was barefooted and his big toe was bruised on the iron rail. It didn't hurt much, but he dropped his glove and sat for a moment on the warm crosstie, holding the injured foot.

Then Hobey smiled broadly, wiggling his toe. "Maybe it's a big enough pain to sell," he said aloud.

Picking up his glove, he walked hurriedly down the street to his home. Both of his parents worked and he knew he would be alone, as always in the afternoons. His forehead creased as he thought of the ad he had cut out of the newspaper. Neither his mother or father had noticed. But he always read the *Cape Fear Journal* from front page to back, word for word, even the parts he did not understand. He had slipped the inconspicuous ad into his secret cigar box, but there was no need to

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read it again now. In the two days since he had first seen it, Hobey had memorized every word — "Wanted to Buy: Pains, Large and Small. Phone 833-9913. 32 Seaboard Street."

As the slender boy took the phone off the hook, he wondered if the white-haired woman would still be there. He had already walked twice to the small remodeled house just beyond the cotton gin at the city limits, and once the mysterious lady had come out and smiled at him. But he had nothing to sell and had walked back home, taking the short cut through Dr. Clay's backyard.

The old woman's voice sounded pleasant over the phone, but still his hand trembled a little and Hobey stammered. "Ma'am, I, I've just hurt my big toe. I wonder if you'd be interested —"

"Why, of course," she interrupted. "You just run on down. We're open till five every weekday and nine on Saturdays."

Hobey smiled. He would be back before his mother returned from her job at the bank. Walking up the uneven sidewalk under the shady oaks, the boy wondered how much he would get for such a little pain. The toe had almost stopped aching, and he thought of pinching it back to a proper redness.

On the porch he hesitated. For just a moment he had an impulse to escape, to jump off the porch and run back as fast as he could. The little house was set off by itself, surrounded by a vacant lot and the Stillman's garden, and no one had seen him come.

"Come in, young man" the old woman called.

Hobey bit his lip, opened the screendoor, and limped in.

He saw that the room was furnished like a dentist's office. There were three chairs, a leather-covered couch, and magazines on an end table. The white-haired woman smiled encouragingly behind her neat desk. Against the wall behind her was a green filing cabinet with a letter on the outside of each drawer. Near the phone a small fan turned, stirring some papers.

"You're the boy who called."

Hobey looked at her, embarrassed by having such a small insignificant pain. He nodded. The frail woman was older than he thought. Her hair was as white as a jimson bloom, and her friendly periwinkle eyes looked at him from behind rimless glasses. She wore a dark silky dress and on one finger a large red stone. Looking at her old wrinkled arms, Hobey thought that her bones seemed on the point of sticking through her parchment skin.

The boy swallowed and edged closer to the desk. There was

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nothing to be afraid of. He held the hurt toe up so she could examine it. "I've got this pain to sell." He pointed to the hurt toe, hoping she would ignore the dirt.

The old woman pursed her lips and adjusted her glasses, squinting at the boy's foot.

"A red, yellow or blue pain?" she asked.

"A what?"

She took a handful of colored cards out of the top drawer. Then she explained that for a red pain the price was ten dollars, a medium pain brought five dollars, and a small one only a dollar.

"Oh. Only a small one, I reckon."

"One blue pain," she said.

The buyer of pains typed out the blue card in duplicate. When she had filed one in the drawer marked M, she handed Hobey a bright silver dollar and the second blue card. As soon as his finger touched the coin, Hobey felt a twinge in his big toe; suddenly all the pain had vanished. He put the money in the pocket of his jeans and turned to go, grinning.

"Thank you," the woman said. "You are my very first customer in Clayton."

Hobey ran down the steps and up the dapple-shaded sidewalk. When he had reached the shade of the town's silver water tower, he took the card out and read it: "Paid to Mr. Hobey Mills for the consideration of one blue pain — $1.00." She had not signed her name.

Wondering what the old woman did with the pains she bought, Hobey hurried up the sidewalk whistling. He still had time to make it to the drugstore for a quick soda before his mother came home. He resolved not to mention the curious bargain to his parents. He would have other pains to sell. Before long, no doubt, he would have enough money in his secret box in his closet to buy the baseball bat he was saving for — with any luck, before school started.

Hobey waited two days before he told anyone of the bargain he made with the little old lady in the house of pain. Then he told his best friend Eddie West. Eddie had spiked his thumb with a fish hook the day before, and it was swollen and throbbing. Hobey volunteered to walk to the mysterious house beyond the city limits with his friend.

On the way, Hobey began to envy Eddie. His was sure to be a yellow pain, maybe even a red one if the finger was really infected. He thought it would be nice if he had another pain to sell, if only a blue one, since he was going to the house of pain anyway. When he got to the railroad tracks, Hobey pretended to be looking at a large truck loaded

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with tobacco driving up the ramp of the Bright Leaf Warehouse. While Eddie was looking up the tracks at the mustard-colored depot, Hobey kicked his toe against the iron rail.

It was the same toe, but nothing happened. There was not even a twinge of pain. She knows, he told himself. You can't cheat by hurting yourself on purpose.

Hobey stood outside the white frame house while Eddie went in alone to sell his pain. He waited under the shade of the elm, smiling at the way his dark-haired friend had looked over his shoulder at him from the porch. This time there were two cars parked before the isolated house. Once Hobey looked up to see an old man with a cane bounding down the steps, a wide grin on his wrinkled face. He walked up the sidewalk, his bamboo cane tucked under his arm.

Then there was Eddie holding his yellow card in one hand and waving a crisp new five-dollar bill. He held his cured finger out. "See," he said. "It don't hurt a scratch now. Gee, what a nice old lady. Come on, Hobey, I'm gonna treat you to a malted."

On the way to the drugstore, Hobey began to wonder. There was a problem that had worried him so much he couldn't sleep the night before.

"What do you suppose she does with them, Eddie?" he asked. "The pains, I mean, after she's bought them."

"Hunh, I don't now and, boy, I don't care — so long as she pays cash money." He took the new bill out of his pocket and admired it.

"But, somehow — gosh, it doesn't seem right. Selling your own pain. Do you suppose it could be wrong to —"

"Of course it's not wrong. My pop knows a man who used to buy dreams. He paid good money for you telling him your dreams. Nobody spoke against it. There's always some fool crank willing to buy anything."

Then, hesitating, Hobey revealed the thought that had kept him awake. "Do you suppose, Eddie, she could be a witch?"

"Who? That nice old lady a witch!" His friend laughed and prodded him in the ribs. "For Pete's sake, act your age, Hobey. You're talking like a first-grader — or our colored cook."

Two days later, Hobey stood in front of the house again. There were tears in his blue eyes, and he held his hurt finger as if it were broken. A line drive had hit him on the end of it, bending it backward, and the finger still throbbed. Surely a red pain, he thought. He would tell the old woman it was a red pain, and it would be the last one he would ever sell. He would have more than enough money to buy

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the Babe Ruth bat. He could buy several bats with one red pain. Hobey blinked his eyes and hoped the aching would last until he stood before the buyer of pains.

This time there were lots of parked cars and two bicycles before the little house. There was even a long-haired girl on a nervous white horse. The people in front of him moved slowly; it was like standing in line to buy a ticket at the theater.

When Hobey had reached the shade of the porch, the tall girl in front of him turned around. Her dark hair was as glossy as a magnolia leaf. She was wearing a white dress, and the side of her jaw was badly swollen. She smiled down at him. "What do you have today?" she asked. "Yellow, blue?"

Hobey replied. "A red pain," holding up his injured finger with pride.

The girl's eyes narrowed. "You'll never get it," she said. She pointed to her jaw. "Infected tooth is only a yellow."

Inside the crowded room Hobey looked around shyly. He recognized one or two of the people sitting in the chairs waiting their turn, and he looked away. He did not wish to speak to anyone.

The white-haired woman was wearing the same dark dress, and she smiled at him when she glanced up and recognized him, her eyes sparkling. She was kept busy filling in the colored cards and pulling out the green drawers of the filing cabinets. Hobey saw that there were many new cabinets, piled now as high as she could reach. Soon, he thought, she'll have to hire a secretary with a second typewriter and all.

Then he looked directly at the old woman who was a buyer of pain. There seemed to be hardly any flesh on her frail bones; still she typed rapidly and she did not seem to tire after a busy day of buying. If anything, her voice sounded stronger than he remembered it.

Hobey held his hurt finger in one hand, pretending to study it. But all the time he listened quietly to the people in line who were selling their pains.

He recognized the dark-haired young woman talking to the old woman. Her beautiful heart-shaped face was pale, her dark eyes blurred. He had heard his mother say that Mary Reeve's young man had died suddenly.

"And where does it hurt?"

Mary Reeves looked out the window and a pale hand went up to her heart.

"Yellow, red?"

"Only a yellow, I think." Her lips trembled.

The buyer of pains smiled and took two red cards out of the drawer and adjusted the carbon. "It is a red, my child." She handed

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her the money with the bright red card.

When Hobey saw the way her face suddenly changed, transfused with joy, he decided there could be nothing wrong with bargaining in the house of colored pains.

Now a stout woman was taking her place before the desk. It was Mrs. Clay's sister-in-law, a large sharp-eyed woman whose grey-streaked hair was disheveled. He had heard his mother say that the old woman's daughters had never married; they had been forced to stay home and care for their sick mother, who was always complaining.

"Why, that's an outrage." he heard the stout woman say.

The old lady behind the desk shook her head calmly.

"Why, I'll have you understand I hurt here and here and here — and almost constantly. My daughters have to even —"

"I'm sorry," the woman said. "One blue pain."

Someone behind the boy snickered.

The woman gasped and her mouth moved rapidly. "This is an insult. I never heard of such a thing in my life. And you just gave that snit of a girl a red card. Don't deny it, because I saw it all. I'll take my business somewhere else next time."

The woman behind the desk smiled patiently, but she was firm.

In the end, the angry woman relented and took the offer. She stalked by Hobey, shoving her way through the smiling crowd and holding the blue card in her hand. "You'll hear from me," she called back from the door. "The mayor of Clayton is a good friend of mine." Then she was gone.

Hobey was glad when the glossy-haired girl had sold her yellow pain and it was his turn.

The kind lady looked at him expectantly. "Red, blue or yellow?"

"Only a blue," Hobey murmured. "My finger has almost stopped aching now."

The woman smiled at him. "It is a yellow, my son," she said quietly, filling in the two cards.

Hobey thanked her and stumbled down the steps past the line of waiting people. His index finger was numb from the lack of pain, but he was not nearly as happy with the crisp bill as he had expected to be. He had even lost the desire to tell Eddie West of his good fortune. Still, he now had more than enough money for the Babe Ruth bat, and he would never have to sell another pain.

From the house of yellow pain he walked straight home and hid the new money in his secret box. He would wait, he decided, a few days before buying the bat. As he hid the bill in his secret box, he had the

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feeling that it might disappear, like the coins in his dreams that always turned into wafers or worthless slugs. Perhaps the whole thing was a dream, and he would wake up and discover that there never had been an old lady who bought his pains.

The crisp five-dollar bill did not disappear, but curiously he felt no desire to buy the long-coveted bat. "I'll just wait a while," he told himself. He swore a silent oath and crossed his heart: he would never sell another pain, of any color.

The little ad was printed in every issue of the paper, but he did not go again to the house of yellow pain, though once a splinter had gashed his heel. One day he bicycled past the house on Seaboard Street, and there was a long line of cars and a crowd of people standing in the shaded yard. He did not stop; he rode alone into the country and picked a bouquet of goldenrods for his mother.

Lately the newspaper seemed more and more to be filled with accidents that befell Clayton citizens. One morning Hobey read that Mrs. Clay's sister-in-law had fallen down the stairs. The next day Mr. Wiggins was scalded when he sat down in a bathtub of hot water. Hobey recalled overhearing Mr. Wiggins sell two yellow pains in his feet. The next day the old man he had seen bounding down the steps with his cane was found unconscious on the river bank. He was suffering from heat exhaustion and strain. Almost every day someone in Clayton was hurt.

The day after Eddie West was taken to the hospital with his finger nearly cut off, Hobey had his accident. He had been expecting it. The mishap was all he needed to force him to reach a decision.

He was sawing a board in the garage, making a rabbit trap to set in the Stillman's garden. Suddenly the board slipped from the sawhorse, and, grabbing for it, he let the handsaw fall, striking his bare foot.

"Good way to lose a toe," Hobey said aloud. He lifted the board back in place and continued working.

When he had finished sawing the board, he looked down and saw the small pool of blood. Without even knowing it, he had sliced his big toe to the bone and a puddle of blood was forming around his right foot.

He had not felt any pain.

Ten minutes later, with a makeshift bandage on his bloody toe, Hobey stood in line before the house of pain. In his hand he clutched two bills and the blue and yellow cards.

A boy on crutches turned around and looked appraisingly at the reddening bandage. "Ah,

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you're in luck today," he said, "Red or blue?"

Hobey did not answer.

"I just hope they don't glut the market before we get in," the boy said. "I heard tell that old lady don't give but eight dollars for reds these days. And yellows are down to seventy cents. Just my luck."

When there were only a few people in front of him, Hobey took the cards and the money out of his pocket. All of these people, he thought, have come to sell their pains, but I am going to buy mine back.

Then he recognized the tall girl in front of him. She was the girl with the yellow toothache.

It was her turn and she leaned far over the desk and whispered, "I would like to buy my pain back."

"I'm sorry," the old woman said patiently. She shook her beautiful white hair.

The tall girl's face looked distraught. "But I'm willing to pay extra. Can't you just this once—"

The buyer of pain interrupted. "I'm very sorry." She said it as if she meant it. "I would if I could but I don't make the rules, you know. The company's policy is never to exchange...."

But the tall girl had already crushed her card and walked away, her shoulders slumped.

Someone pushed Hobey. "Move up, boy."

"You go ahead," he told the man behind him. "I'm in no hurry."

"Suit yourself, sonny."

Hobey waited until there were two men on crutches bending over the desk at one time and a fat woman in a flowery hat crowding in on one side.

"Stop pushing," someone said, but still more people were shoving their way through the door and into the room.

When he saw the old woman filling out a form, Hobey slipped over to the file marked M. Quickly he slid it open and found the folder with his name on it. Then he dropped the money and cards in and snatched out the originals.

The minute he touched the blue and yellow cards, a sharp pain seized his toe and finger. But he turned, a triumphant wince on his face, and made his way through the door and down the steps. No one had noticed.

"He must have made a good sale," he heard a man say.

When he stopped running, the pain had almost gone from his toe and finger. Hobey stopped beside a trash can. He took out the yellow and blue cards and slowly tore them into little pieces. Then he tossed them into the can and walked unhurriedly up the street. For the first time in a week he was whistling.

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It was over twenty accidents later when the news flash came over the radio concerning the disturbance at the mysterious house on Seaboard Street. Hobey turned the radio off and ran down the sidewalk toward the house of yellow pain. When he saw the growing mob in the street, he slipped up the row of corn in Mr. Stillman's garden and waited.

The people were milling around in front of the house. "Give us back our pain!" One woman shouted, "We were tricked and cheated!"

More and more cars were stopping, and Hobey saw a policeman in uniform trying to restore order.

When the little old lady opened the back door, Hobey ducked behind some pole beans. She was wearing the dark silky dress, and in one hand she carried a dark box which swung from a rope handle.

Hobey looked at the box. "All those pains are in there," he told himself.

The woman who bought pain did not walk hurriedly, and Hobey followed her as she cut across the Stillman's backyard and up the shadowed sidewalk. She was humming a song and swinging the box in her hand.

Just as she reached Main Street, a bus pulled up and the door opened, without a signal from her. The boy saw *Special* written in black letters across the front of the bus. The handsome driver wore a dark uniform and spoke to the new passenger as if he knew her.

Behind him, two blocks away, a hoarse shout went up. Hobey knew, without seeing the smoke, that the mob had set fire to her house. Almost immediately he heard the crackling of flames.

The little old woman stepped on the bus and the door closed. But when she took her seat by the bluish glass window, a strange thing happened. As Hobey watched, the old woman suddenly became young. She was, he thought, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her white hair turned to gold, and her lips were full and red. The rimless glasses had disappeared.

As the bus pulled away, she turned in the seat and smiled down at him. She held up her hand and waved, her lips parted. One finger wore the red stone, but her bones did not look now as if they were about to come through the skin, Hobey said to himself, "Maybe it was someone else sitting there or just that special blue glass."

He did not know whether she was a witch or not. But one thing he was sure of: as he wiggled his sore toe and finger, he was glad it was all over and he had managed to get back his pains.

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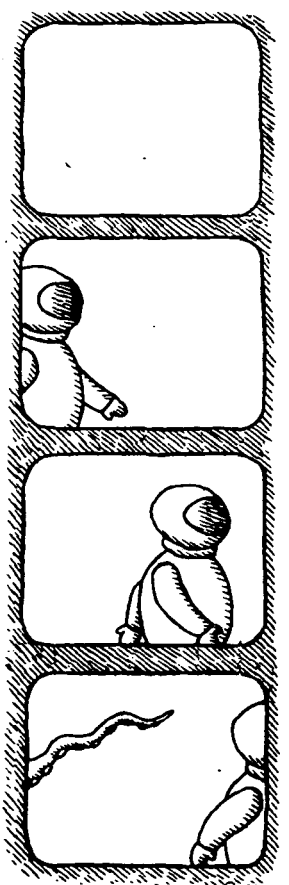
PICNIC WORLD

Phase IV (Saul Bass, director) starts with the now familiar trip through interstellar space which culminates with a stunning shot of what seems to be the sun revolving around the Earth, a somewhat cockeyed visual reference to "2001." This pretty well sums up the film: extremely handsome photography and none-too-rational plot, with a lot of influence in the visuals from the Kubrick-Clarke masterwork.

Some unexplained cosmic occurence triggers a mutation in the ant world of Earth, apparently in both its intelligence and its adaptability. (I will use or imply the word "apparently" fairly often about this film, since cause and motive are not made any too clear.) A biologist first discovers the evidence of this in an "ecological imbalance" in an Arizona desert valley — natural enemies of ants are disappearing and different species seem to be co-operating — and manages in an unexplained fashion to set up an incredibly complex and expensive research center there, consisting of a geodesic dome crammed full of computers and flashing lights, not to mention a young assistant

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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expert in games theory. His function will be to analyze the language of the ants.

The two men settle in for a siege after visiting the last remaining family in the valley; the other inhabitants have fled and the Eldridges are ordered to evacuate. Unknown to Hubbs and Lesko, they decide to stay; when Hubbs attempts to precipitate some action by blowing up a group of mysterious towers erected by the ants, it is the Eldridges who are attacked first. As they try to take refuge in the dome, the ants attack and the outer rim of defense — a poison spray — is turned on and the Eldridges are killed. Their beautiful granddaughter, Kendra, survives and is brought into the dome by the scientists.

The ants continue to besiege and infiltrate the dome. They surround it with small mounds with reflective, angled tops which raise the heat level inside; cut off communications; send in guerrillas to sabotage the air-conditioning; and develop a new strain which can withstand the poison. Lesko analyzes their language through long distance mikes and attempts to communicate with a mathematical concept; he is answered by the queen with a mysterious symbol which seems to imply that the ants want one of the people in the dome.

Kendra thinks it is she that they want and walks out alone to go down under the onslaught of the ants. Hubbs decides to make a suicide raid on the queen, but almost immediately falls into a pit-trap dug by the ants and is eaten alive. Lesko attempts the same thing; semi-delirious from heat and ant bites, he finds the nest and slides down into it, to a narrative climax so ambiguous that it would be folly to try to talk about it. I can but say that it is a semi-mystical number that again brings "2001" to mind.

Now as you can see, there are loose ends for days here. One is not assaulted with the psuedo-scientific goodledy-gook that we used to get in the '50s nature-against-man movies; the trouble is that we are not given much of *anything* to go on. Apparently the initial astronomical image is meant to imply some sort of cosmic force which triggers this mutation, but this is a classic case of information which simply can't be completely or successfully communicated solely visually. I've pointed out before that many people seem incapable of "reading" the information given in certain highly visual films ("Zardoz" is your perfect example). This does not mean, though, that all forms of information lend themselves readily to communication in film. In a slightly different context, George

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Balanchine once said, "There are no mothers-in-law in ballet" and that is true in movies, also.

Another major flaw in the film is the intra-human drama, which I didn't mention while synopsizing because it is completely extraneous to the point of the movie. Hubbs, the biologist, is presented as yet another variation of the scientist so absorbed in abstract knowledge that human concerns are meaningless. His conflicts with the younger Lesko revolve around this issue, but it all comes across as bickering which serves only to fill time and distract from the matter of major interest. It seems to me that most of the successful science fiction movies are those that dispensed with the attempt to inject "human interest" with artificial romances or conflicts among the human characters.

Nonetheless and despite all this negativism, I can still recommend the film for one good reason. It's a knockout to look at. Nobody has done much with ants since "Them" and "The Naked Jungle" (two very good films in their own right). Since then, enormous strides have been taken in what could be called biophotography — one need only to look at the nature specials strewn across the week's TV schedule, most of which are damn well done. Here the ants are normal sized and *en masse*, a la "Naked Jungle," not the giant size of "Them," but an enormous amount of footage is devoted to watching them in their tunnels at close range. Even this has been seen in some of the better documentaries, but here, with editing and some off-beat special effects (ant make-up!), there is an attempt to imply purpose and intelligence that doesn't always work — but the times that it does make the movie worth while despite all its faults. At one point, for example, the ants gather a sample of the poison to take back to the nest; a single ant carries it until she collapses, then another takes it until her death. In this gruesome fashion, it is transported to the queen, who ingests it. The camera travels down her body to the constant stream of eggs emerging from her rear; suddenly one appears that is the color of the poison — the ants have adapted.

This is wonderfully original moviemaking; though most of the film is more or less a shambles, *Phase IV* opens up some new potential in the usage of biophotography for dramatic effect which could result in some extraordinary cinema.

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In which Mr. Wellen marches bravely through a theme which is high on any sf editor's list of hoary ideas that are no longer worth a fig, and comes out with flying colors.

The Second Fall, or Anthony Comstock's Final Victory

by EDWARD WELLEN

Weather had so softened the world-wide ruins that it was hard to tell whether war or pestilence or natural disaster had wiped out all life or whether life had simply petered out. As the Tr'toor, in scanning orbit, watched this dead world unroll its emptiness, hopelessness grew.

Once long ago the planet had cast its message upon the cosmos, saying that the planet was alive and well and orbiting such-and-such a sun. Now that the Tr'toor, a comrade in the great loneliness, had traced the to-whom-it-may concern message to the source, the source had fallen silent, and the Tr'toor's loneliness was all the greater. Life there had been rich and full, but life there was now none. In an inversion of gravity, the planet pressed its emptiness at the Tr'toor.

So that it was with a silent clamor that the man and the woman suddenly struck the Tr'toor's extended senses. When the Tr'toor's mute *boinngg!!!* of shock damped down, the unmoving pair stood sharp and clear.

The two were unaware of the alien presence, unaware of each other, unaware of self. Unaware because they were not there to experience but to be experienced. They were a work of art, a statue.

A silting of dust had buried them to the calves. They stood in what had been the patio of a temple or museum or school, some public building whose roof and walls and floor were one worn jumble.

The Tr'toor hovered, savoring the moment and the find, then let its timecraft touch earth. Timecraft; the Tr'toor traversed space by skipping in and out of time. The terms of eternity and eventuality, any of the spinning universe's infinite number of points would come within reach, and the Tr'toor

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could engage in simultaneity with the most distant. The timecraft opened after assuring itself that this world had long since cleansed itself of poisons that might have tainted air and soil. The Tr'toor crawled out.

It felt its own heaviness as it moved toward the statue. Near enough to make out detail, far enough to take in the whole, it halted. It marveled at the lightness and grace the stone figures suggested.

For a moment, face-to-face with these naked ideals of a vanished race, the Tr'toor felt shame for its own furriness. They were life-size, to go by the scale of fragments of steps and doorways. The work must have been of and by and for the dominant species of this world. A machine might emulate love. But no machine would have left the work's preservation to luck.

The Tr'toor drew its all-purpose rod and blew away the dust from the lower part of the statue. Now the Tr'toor could see that the male had just downed tools. The stone tools and the spirited pose told the Tr'toor the story of the statue.

Taut as a bowstring, the male arched backward wonder-struck, as the female he had finished chipping out of stone came alive. The Tr'toor surmised this was the showing forth of some ancient myth symbolizing the promise and peril of creativity. Promise, because art brought dead matter to life. Peril, because the creator might fall too much in love with his handiwork.

The Tr'toor stared at the male's sex, though it had seen stranger, and wondered at the mystery of the female's veiled by a swirl of her long tresses. The Tr'toor turned to the study of the other details. The musculature, the veining, the modeling of flesh, were all so lifelike that the likenesses might have been beings turned to stone as water containing calcium carbonate or silica might infiltrate and replace the organic material particle by a particle and so petrify a fallen tree. This thought moved the Tr'toor to take readings with its rod. The testing showed that these two lifelike creatures had never been anything but stone through and through.

Anxious though it was to leave this still world and answer other cries in the wilderness, cries that might not yet have died out, the Tr'toor did not turn to go. The Tr'toor did not pause to ask itself whether it wanted to play God or simply to play. Maybe the story of the statue — art bringing dead matter to life — moved the Tr'toor to emulation.

In any event, the Tr'toor knew that the statue moved it strangely, moved it so strongly that it could not leave this planet without

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first trying to raise the statue to the power of life. It set about doing so.

With the bite of its rod the Tr'toor dug a pit alongside the statue. With the lights of its rod the Tr'toor fused the soil to give the pit an impermeable lining. With the lift of its rod the Tr'toor lowered the statue into the pit. The Tr'toor turned its rod on the pile of dirt that had come out of the pit. The world was one compost heap lacking only seed, and this was good humus. The rod transformed the humus into protoplasm, a thick soup of nucleoproteins, lipoproteins, and enzymes. This soup poured back into the pit and covered the statue.

The rod of the Tr'toor shot a chain-lightning impulse of programming into the pool, routing the unionized molecules that would permeate the stone. From now on the structure of the two figures would determine their infrastructure. Once life began to flow, to flower, it had its own logic and momentum. The planet's magnetic field, its cosmic ray intake, and its circadian beat and other rhythms, would determine the local DNA pattern. The stone would slowly transfigure itself, become living tissue. Given the shape, the organs to run it would form; given the organs of function and feedback, the beings would become aware of selfhood and otherness.

The Tr'toor looked into the pool, sensed the silent simmering, and knew that the promise had begun to fulfill itself. The Tr'toor made ready to go. Even if the Tr'toor's anxiety to answer other calls had not pressed it to leave, the Tr'toor, mindful of the peril — the creator in danger of falling too much in love with the thing created — would have gone from the planet before the process proved itself.

But first, with another touch of programming, the Tr'toor restored the memory of fruitfulness to the soil all about the pit, so that when the two awakened into their dream of life, the dream could sustain itself.

Now the Tr'toor crawled back to its timecraft, sealed itself inside, and broke simultaneity. Though the Tr'toor left before the fullness of the fact, the Tr'toor left with the belief that it had breathed life into the male and the female and that it had enabled them to be fruitful and to multiply and to replenish the earth.

By the time of the first greening, when the beginnings of a garden grew up around the pit, the figures were half stone, half flesh. The more they became flesh the more they gave way to the pull of the world's core, and they folded down and lay coiled.

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They came up choking into air and life. They pulled themselves up out of the pool. Breathing deep, they looked at each other and the world in wonder.

They learned, or seemed already to know, many things. They knew to gather fruit and grain to eat, and they knew to save and plant the seeds for after seasons, and they knew to use pieces of wood to help with the gathering and the threshing and the planting. They knew to collect the rain and its runoff to drink and to bathe in and, after they mastered fire, to brew with. But the foremost thing they learned, or seemed already to know, was woman and man, though for now something stood in the way of consummating this knowledge.

The pool had all but dried up, leaving a crusty scum. When they cleaned this away to make of the pit a fit catch basin, they found at the bottom the tools that had been part of the statue. These stone likenesses of tools had turned to steel. Their hands seemed to know they were made to handle the tools. They learned to use the tools to make more tools. Sparks taught them fire.

They built themselves a shelter and furnished it. They knew to weave fibers and to spin thread and to make needles of thorns. Somehow they seemed to know that colder days and nights drew near, and they fashioned clothing and blankets. But still some shameful knowledge lay buried.

When colder nights came, even fire and clothing and blankets were not enough against the chill. The man and the woman slept together for warmth. Touch taught them another fire.

But something was amiss. They knew this other fire was there, for it burned in their flesh, but it could not blaze forth.

By now they had learned speech, but they had no words to tell each other what had gone wrong. Inside them, flames of love turned to icicles of hate.

But now the stone fig leaf of the statue, which leaf had grafted itself to the male member and imposed its logic on the life that had been building up in the figures while they turned from stone to flesh, knew its time had come. It detached itself and fluttered down.

Now the fire of the flesh could have its way, and it blazed forth.

In the summer the woman gave birth to a perfect fig.

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From the environmental front, Mr. Malzberg reports on a very different kind of imminent extinction. We have it from an unreliable source that Mr. Malzberg traded in his Honda Civic for a Cadillac in the Fall of 1973.

Sedan Deville

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

Dear Sir:

Big coupe de ville Deora custom option on it; she say put all this together explain your case. I say to coupe de ville no this is not way to do it but she say fantastic big car power antenna power door locks power seats power windows power trunk release FM-radio and signal seek she say you state your case to them just like I state mine to yours. Gaskets loose I fix, I think. Kurt Delvecchio take advice.

I published writer Kurt Delvecchio. Eight months ago I send short story based on true life experiences with Cadillac cars to editor TERRIFIC SCIENCE FICTION he ask if I ever publish before and say will clean up grammar but buy story because it unusual. I write second story also based on true life experience and editor take this one too and then I write another story which he take and then I write still one more just like other three based on life experience of Cadillac car and editor reject saying stories amusing and original at first but all pretty much in same key. Then I get letter from publisher saying magazine going out of business except for last issue enclosed with my first story and also check and also other two stories not publishing. They say tight market.

Reading story in magazine discourage because cleaning up grammar seem to have taken out heart but as editor explain readership of science-fiction magazines wants good grammar and so he does this for me because I have fine idea at first and what he call "instinctual feel." So this is situation right now: one story publish two stories would be publish but return with no money one story rejected no good and one story half finished because of news I receive. White coupe de ville say I

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put this very good you not misunderstand.

I understand that you are agent. That your job as agent is to sell stories of writers and deduct ten percent (10%) of sale price after sale. I ask you to sell this story I send with letter; it is the second (2nd) story I wrote which he would have bought had it not been for accident. Once you sell story you get next story to sell then next then I finish up fifth and so on. I have much to tell as you see also true and real message which must be explained now.

I also enclose copy of publish story in magazine so that you can see I am publish writer.

Dear Sir:

In answer to your question I engine mechanic in Cadillac dealership in Paramus New Jersey eight miles from the Washington Bridge this is how I got material for story and how I got what you call "convincing portrait of Cadillac car." Cadillac overhead valve V-8 fantastic big engine four hundred and seventy-five cubic inches since nineteen seventy-one standard, five hundred cc in Eldorado convertible and coupe both turning two hundred and seventy-five horsepower. Engine was once big and simple but now is big and complicated due to intake manifolds complex carburetor attachments high-temperature condensers and other technical things to meet new emission control requirements. Working on overhead valve V-8 all day most jobs relating to poor carburetion with underhood temperatures near one thousand degrees farenheit enables man to understand workings of Cadillac car.

Cadillac car is a simple and elegant tool and engines last forever. Know from transmission and electrical system men in shop that in Cadillacs these go all the time fuses popping bands slipping but even in auto graveyard on Pennsylvania Avenue Cadillac engine still turns over, still works; engine is heart of car and will not die. Transmissions and electrical not so good also front wheel alignment terrible very hard to wheels balance but not this department. Working under hoods of Cadillac vehicles gives me good understanding of cars and I put this understanding in my stories which Mr. Walter Thomas complimented me upon and published one would have published two others in his magazine.

You ask why second story also about Cadillac do I not have range? I do not know what you mean by "range" I tell you only Cadillac car is like a woman great in its mysteries and not exhausted not even in twenty-five stories. Second

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story takes different point of view like woman would to two different men and I surprise you not see this.

I do not understand what you mean either by reading fee for unpublished writers; I am not unpublished writer as issue of magazine I sent to you makes quite clear but published writer once two other stories accepted. Wages at dealership are union scale plus overtime; take home to wife one hundred and sixty-three dollars and twenty cents last week which was typical week less sick benefits union dues taxes and so on. I can no afford to pay fee for reading or sending around stories. I began writing stories to make more money to add to wages. I enclose third story also accepted story by Mr. Walter Thomas which I hope you like and will sell for me.

Dear Sir:

Boss mechanic very pleased by idea Kurt Delvecchio is published writer; pass magazine around in shop. Some make jokes about what Cadillac mechanic doing writing for comic-book type magazine but they over in Fleetwood department working on series seventy-five chassis and do not speak English most of them quite stupid. Salesmen also very impressed; sometimes they take customers and point out me, Kurt Delvecchio, the "writing mechanic."

I do not understand your remark about third story; third story about Cadillac just as second and first were because all I write about is Cadillacs because I heard you must write what you know and that is what I know ... Cadillac sedan de ville, Cadillac coupe de ville, Cadillac calais and Fleetwood, Eldorado Coupe and Convertible, flower cars and commercial chassis for ambulance and hearses. That is what I know and working on overhead valve V-8 plugs and points singing to me at idle speed two thousand rpm true when well tuned it is like car is alive and speaking to me. All I do is put down words that car speaks car is real and alive I merely its messenger at times like these. Other times I just like other mechanics although have ambitions which most do not. I no pay a reading or marketing fee to circulate one (1) story of published writer and send you this fourth story which Mr. Walter Thomas reject because he say it too different in scope and style while still being too much like in others. I hope you read and send this one out for me as due to recent crisis which you must know and read about I mean so-called "energy crisis" business in dealership down eighty percent business in shop down twenty-seven percent junior men being laid off and although Kurt Delvecchio has

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some seniority I wish to find another source of income just in case.

Dear Sir:

Story told from point of view of see-through hood ornament (option extra cost twenty dollars $20.00) because that is what I feel when wrote it; the way see-through hood ornament on coupe de ville would feel as being driven around Paramus Route 4 and Route 17 intersection also Bergen Mall. If had not felt it would not have written it Cadillac car is a real thing even though "energy crisis" going to destroy it is just as real as "aliens" or "Terrans" and other things in Mr. Walter Thomas's magazines (which I have read) and you wrong to say that it not salable also to say that this is positively last time you will react to story without fee I must pay fee of thirty dollars ($30) in future. This show no understanding also no realization that Kurt Delvecchio is not amateur but true professional writer who combine love and knowledge of Cadillac car with stories that make Cadillac car *real* for first time in universe it give it side of story.

Very angry at you for this treatment white coupe de ville on which I worked today (only car in shop) also very mad despite defective ignition and dropped gaskets which have drenched oil pan and suspension system. White coupe de ville and I agree will not deal with you any more.

Instead to prove that Kurt Delvecchio is no fool and that he know how to sell to science-fiction magazines or anywhere else for that matter coupe de ville and I (it is '72 coupe de ville with customized Cabriolet roof and Deora option on portholes) are going to send copies of my letters to you copies which I very cleverly keep at advice of Mr. Walter Thomas–who encouraging new author tells him always to keep copies of letters he writes to publishers or editors or agents and white coupe de ville and I send out story *together* story being copies of these letters to next science-fiction magazine on list.

When next science-fiction magazine publishes letters *proving* that Kurt Delvecchio has something of great interest to say you will be sorry! but I will give you no percentage because of the many insults you have heaped on me in your own letters. White cabriolet coupe de ville stay overnight in shop tonight; tomorrow morning early I finish gaskets and it go away and I cry when it leave shop because shop then empty Kurt Delvecchio being one of only three (3) mechanics left but that is life as Mr. Walter Thomas would have said. If you do not think that these

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cars are alive or that evil men are killing them you not understand what is happening or what real meaning of stories is is what Deora and I we say to you. *"Energy crisis" a plot to kill deora.*

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Joseph Green, whose stories for F&SF have been consistently inventive tales of off-Earth sf, is at the top of his form with this new story about an interstellar safari to a planet called Blue.

Jaybird's Song

by JOSEPH GREEN

This is my song.

I sing this song in English because I must write words on paper. The people you call Bluejays, my people, have no written tongue. Therefore, I address you in the way you have taught me.

I am called the Jaybird, or Jay by my friends. I was born on the planet you call Blue, in your year 2137. My father was a Singer, as his had been before him. And I too once started the long and arduous task of memorizing the Great Songs of the People. But that labor was broken when you took me away at the age of nine summers, and I could not resume it after I returned from Earth. My heart was no longer with my people.

Neither had I left it on Earth. My heart was nowhere.

But to my song ... it began when Jeffrey Dalton and his party landed at the Quigsby Station, and I first saw Frances Carse. Something stirred and moved in my soul at the sight of her. She was not as pretty as her old sister Constance, the wife of Jeffrey. Very slim, a little reserved and quiet, she smiled pleasantly when Grant Sutton introduced me. But when Grant mentioned I had spent eight years on Earth and had been educated there, I saw the quick interest in her dark brown eyes.

"Oh, were you part of the 'Primitive Uplift' program World-Gov just abolished? Why did you return home? I thought the program died because all the graduates wanted to stay on Earth."

I studied this tall trim woman with the firm body and soft eyes, and saw she was truly interested. "I chose to return home because my 'special schooling' hadn't qualified me for any worthwhile occupation on Earth," I answered. "And with

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the Uplift program dead, I could not win a mate who would give me children. I was the only Bluejay on Earth."

"Yes, I know how important children are in your culture," Frances said. "And you stayed here long enough for your native patterns to become internalized, unfortunately."

"But I thought humans and Bluejays were practically identical!" broke in Constance Dalton. She kept her voice deliberately low, husky, and warm. "Except for a few, uh ... minor details, of course."

I knew what she meant, but chose to keep silent. It was obvious why Constance was here. As for Frances, Grant had told me she was studying to become an extres-ethnologist, and this was her required field trip. Jeffrey Dalton was along to pay the bills. He was the scion of an old American family, with money that stretched back for ten generations. He would need it; interstellar travel and private safaris on primitive worlds were expensive.

Not that such pleasure trips were uncommon. A great many people on Earth could afford them. Otherwise, Grant Sutton would not have been in business on Blue as an outfitter, and I would not have been his junior partner and chief guide.

"Those 'minor details' make a big difference at the genetic level, Connie," said Jeffrey. He was a tall ruddy-faced man just past forty, with sleepy blue eyes and a casual friendly manner that hid a deeply ingrown arrogance. "And as I've said before, the one you've heard the most about just isn't true."

Constance Dalton smiled, a wry irreverent curving of sensual pink lips. She was a very lovely woman by Earthly standards, as tall as her sister but with wider hips and a far larger bust. Her hair was a deep rich gold, obviously an implanted mutation, and she wore it in a soft cloud to her shoulders. The carefully tended skin was as white as my own, most unusual in an Earthwoman. Only around the eyes was her beauty beginning to fade. There were tiny wrinkles in both corners, the first signs of a life devoted primarily to drinking good liquors and running through good lovers.

"We'd better go over how many bearers we're going to need," Grant broke in. The unspeakable was about to be spoken, and he wanted to stop it. "Now you understand that each person carries his own pack with his personal possessions? The bearers are for the guest tents, the generator, the food, and so on. If you agree, then two bearers for each guest, or six, should do it."

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"Whatever the custom is," Jeffrey said affably. "Though I don't really approve of Connie and Fran carrying their own packs."

"That's part of the spirit of roughing it, Jeff," Frances said, smiling. When her face became animated and lively, she grew almost pretty, though the thin features and dun-brown hair were no competition for her sister. "Don't worry about us. You're paying dearly for the thrill of doing all that hard work."

"For me it'll be good exercise," Jeffrey replied, flexing arms kept muscular in some expensive athletic club on distant Earth. "Just don't want you developing bulges in the wrong places, sis."

Grant and I left them in the guest quarters and went outside to plan the final details. The Dalton party was going well over a hundred kilometers northward, to spend a week with the tribe of Baross. Frances was equipped with miniature recording devices, to gather material. Her sister and brother-in-law were supposedly along for the thrill of exploring a primitive world.

Except that the exchange between the Daltons made it clear that Constance was seeking other thrills as well. Many woman like her appeared at Quigsby Station. Rich, bored to tears by all the pleasures of Earth, they came looking for a unique and "different" experience, one the home world could no longer offer. What these women really want is never stated in the contract, not spoken aloud — but we always supply it.

The rumor that a Bluejay penis is half again as large as the human one just is not true, though. In fact, Bluejays are nearly identical to *Homo sapiens* in physical structure, or so my teachers said. Only our milk-white skin, with its underlying blue tinge, separates us from the Nordic tribes of Earth. And if we deliberately expose ourselves to the sun — something that seldom happens to the deep forest dwellers here — our skin tans until the blue is hidden. On Earth, I passed for human.

My tan faded rapidly under the sheltering trees of Blue, but there was no returning home of the heart. I had seen and learned too much, been taken too far from my people ever to fully rejoin them.

I compromised by keeping a foot in both camps. As an outfitter, I lived at the station, working for the day Grant would retire to Earth and the business became mine. But as the son of a Singer in the Tribe of Asab, much of my free time was spent with my people.

"What about Takab, Ahmo, and Derab as bearers?" Grant asked as we walked toward the main building. "And three men

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from Nikil's tribe. I've heard they're just south of here."

"Derab is leaving in four days to start his mate-quest." Perhaps, the thought came to me, that hot-tempered young warrior would be a good choice for Constance. "I will ask his older brother Perbo. And it is a good idea to ask Nikil for men. He has complained that we choose too much from my own tribe."

"Fine, I'll start gathering up the food. Let's try to get them off tomorrow morning. The Daltons impress me as the type who would cause trouble if they hung around here."

I nodded and turned toward the closely encircling trees. When their dark shadows enfolded me, I stretched into an easy lope, one a Bluejay can maintain all day. Two hours later, I reached my tribe's camp, ten kilometers to the southwest.

Berga, chief of the Tribe of Asab, greeted me in a friendly manner. He knew I was no longer a true Bluejay, that my heart had died on Earth. But I was a son of the Great People, and Berga traded with me on a basis of equality.

I asked that he dispatch a runner to Nikil to say three bearers were needed by morning; this was done. Berga agreed without argument to the three men Grant and I had selected. I briefly shared food with him according to custom and left to hunt Derab. My business with him took only a few minutes. Then I visited my own family. My two sisters and mother were busily weaving the new hut they would inhabit for the next several days. My father Terti was out hunting.

"Terti will be sorry to have missed you, only son," my mother said formally. "He wishes to ask you once more why he cannot have one of the shooting canes that would make hunting so easy. This he cannot understand."

"Then he will have to accept what I say without understanding it," I replied, angry that I was to be pestered again. How could i explain to a primitive mind that the reason he wanted guns was the exact reason he could not have them? They would indeed make hunting easy ... so much so that the Tribe of Asab would grow at the expense of their neighbors, shatter the brotherhood of the Great People, bring on territorial wars and repeat the whole bloody history of the human race on Earth. We had no record of tribal warefare on Blue, where all people were recognized as One.

My mother shrugged and returned to her work. Shasi, a sister six years younger than I, grinned at me impudently and said, "The elder daughter of Nikil is now a year past marriage age, Older

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Brother. It is said she waits until you return to our tribe, though many men have crawled seeking her favor. Will you come back soon, or does the Pretty one wait in vain?"

"Tell the chief's lovely daughter she had best choose and marry now," I growled, angry again — but at the fate that kept me between worlds, not as my sister.

I turned and walked back toward the trail to Quigsby. By the time I reached it I was running, driving myself hard. I did not have to think while running, could forget the long sleek legs of Berga's daughter, ignore the fact most warriors my age were fathers while I had not crawled to my first mat. Running, I could forget myself.

It was well after dark when I reached the station. I walked quietly toward my quarters at the rear of the main building. There were lights on in the guest house. I heard loud and happy voices raised in some old song of Earth. One of the two feminine ones sounded drunkenly happy. The second was a clear rich soprano that seemed equally joyful, but sober.

I cursed all the rich people on Earth and went to bed.

The Daltons declined to rise when called next morning; we were late getting started. We finally left just before noon, the three guests, six bearers, and myself. A second party was due in shortly, and Grant had to stay and serve as guide for them.

It was cool and pleasant under the shade of our giant trees. I led them at a brisk walk, a heavy pack resting easily on my shoulders, my rifle ready for instant use. There are several large and very dangerous animals on Blue. Our young men become warriors when they have killed one of these. On Earth, I was taught, young warriors more often killed each other.

Our climate would be called temperate on Earth. The forests are very thick, though without heavy brush. Rarely did the ground see sunlight; if it did, a Bluejay avoided that area. I followed well-worn game trails, but occasionally we had to leave them and walk through uncleared ground. We had been moving less than an hour when Constance called "Jaybird? Really, must you walk so fast? I'm not as rugged as Jeff and Fran."

We were between two trails at the time. I used the rough terrain as an excuse to ease the pace. She looked at me gratefully, the full pink lips curving upward slightly in a half smile, full of promise.

I knew what Constance Dalton was thinking. Did I have the primitive fire and fury she had come here seeking, or had too much of Earth's civilizing influence ruined me?

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Both women were dressed in brown shorts and shirts, of rugged material but comfortable fit. Somehow this had become the accepted clothing for such expeditions. Constance had legs as beautiful as the rest of her, though they looked soft. Frances' legs were a trifle slim, but firm and leanly muscled. Jeffrey's bulged with the knots and swells of a weight lifter.

We stopped for a late lunch. Afterwards I took Constance's pack on my shoulders, and she managed to keep up the rest of the afternoon. But she was exhausted by dusk, dragging one foot after the other, shoulders slumped and head sagging. Why Earthpeople still drink alcohol, and suffer its aftereffects, remains a mystery to me. There are less harmful intoxicants available, but none have been able to compete with this ancient nerve depressant.

Frances walked with the experienced hiker's easy stride. She looked capable of going on all night. Jeffrey, to my surprise, was as tired as Constance. His bulging muscles were actually very soft, and he too was suffering from the heavy drinking of the night before.

Takab and Ahmo helped me set up camp. Working quickly, we hung the light metal net from the nearest branches we could reach, enclosing an area of about 20 by 20 meters. I connected the extensions to the small but heavy generator—one bearer's entire load — and flipped the switch. Light flooded down from a hundred inset bulbs. A second switch would turn on a detector current that drew a heavy amperage to any area contacted by an animal body. I usually waited until the camp was asleep before activating it.

I showed the guests how to operate the small privacy switch in each tent. They, too, connected to the generator. When the current was on the tough but tissue-thin walls turned black and opaque. They also stopped sound, a quality the more timid visitors found very reassuring — and women like Constance very handy.

I hadn't bothered to ask Constance if she wanted a tent large enough for two. It was obvious she did not want to share one with her husband.

At dinner Constance had two drinks from some bottle she carried. Color returned to her face, and her manner became more animated. I wondered if she was anticipating her thrill this soon. If so, she would be badly fooled. We were not due to meet Derab for four more days.

"Jay, I'm too tired now to work," Frances said after the meal. "But when I have the strength one night, I want to interview you."

"If you wish. But it won't help.

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I see too much from your own viewpoint. You need that of the unspoiled native."

"Do I detect a slight note of sarcasm there?" Constance asked.

"If so, I apologize for it," I said immediately. "No, I'm sincere in saying Frances should obtain most of her data from other Bluejays. My people have thought patterns that differ from yours — and often mine."

"I'm sure you know yourself best, but I'm sorry to hear it," said Frances.

"Me too," Constance added, with her small suggestive half smile — and I knew I had been eliminated from consideration.

Not that it mattered. I had no desire for this soft spoiled woman, beautiful though she was and sensually giving though she would undoubtedly be ... I was far more impressed with her younger sister.

Normally I was not attracted to the women under my care on these excursions. There was something greedy, overexpectant, self-indulgent in them that repelled me. The slim bodies and strong legs of of the Bluejay women I found far more stirring. But our tribal laws were strict, and a man who crawled had to marry any woman who held him on her mat until the dawn. The Earthwomen were easy and safe, but I had never slept with one. Frances was the first in my two years as a guide who stirred and excited me. And she was here on a serious mission, not as a seeker of thrills.

"You girls can talk all night if you want to, but I'm tired," said Jeffrey, rising, "See you in the morning."

"We'd all better get some rest," Frances agreed. She vanished inside her tent, and a moment later the cloth turned black and seemed to fade into the shadows."

The drink Constance had taken at dinner was some form of stimulant. She was not sleepy and begged me to stay and talk with her. Not being really tired, I consented. And for an hour we sat and idly chatted, listening to the constant night sounds of the forest and staring at the bright sharp eyes that came to the barrier. Those animals that touched it hurriedly moved away when the current increased and became painful.

Within that one short hour Constance and I became friends. Now that I was no longer a potential sex partner, her attitude toward me changed, became less challenging. At heart she was a simple woman, in the way true sophistication often simplifies a person's goals and beliefs. She had tried most of what life had to offer, chosen what she liked best, and made indulging in it her primary pleasure. Once she could relax with

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me, be herself, she became an amiable and plesant person, with none of her husband's natural arrogance.

Bone-deep tiredness finally overcame the stimulant, and Constance went to bed. I sat alone by the wood fire a few minutes more, then made a final check of the alarm system and joined my brethren in the large tent. We did not maintain a guard; there was no need.

By the end of the third day all three humans were in much better condition. They easily walked the distance I had set and felt no need to rush to bed after dinner. I had talked frequently with Constance and Frances, and occasionally with Jeffrey. Time did nothing to lessen my initial impressions. The sisters were strong-willed individuals, each tolerant of the other's goals. Jeffrey was a man with no ambitions at all. The best that could be said of him was that he knew why Constance was here and didn't care. At least he was not possessive of his beautiful wife.

On the fifth day all three guests were displaying the unmistakable glow of vitality exercise can bring to softened bodies. I calculated two more days would bring us to Baross territory. I had timed it well for Derab to meet us. Constance was ready and could live on short sleep for a few nights.

I had not seen him, but felt certain Derab was paralleling our track. He was lucky to be starting his mate-quest at this time. For a year, if he lasted that long, he would approach each tribe he found with a gift of meat on his shoulder. After acceptance he would enter the young men's house, where he would be appraised and evaluated by every eligible woman. After a few nights he would make his first crawl. Over a month or six weeks he would slither up to the mat of woman after woman, as silently as a snake. A rejected man had no choice but to crawl away as quietly as he had come. If he was accepted, the woman was his for the night — but if she clamped arms and legs around him and refused to let him go, he was hers for the rest of their lives.

A careful young man surveyed all the windows in each tribe, picking out those who would think him too young or immature for a husband. These he crawled to first. Older women seldom rejected a man at the mat or held him until the dawn. Some men on quest went from tribe to tribe without daring approach a young girl; they were unwilling to risk early marriage. But eventually every man played out his hand, and some woman locked her legs tightly around his and held him until the sun sanctified their mating.

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Which was the main reason I never had a problem finding someone to crawl to our clients. Though the young men often joked afterward about the lack of strength and passion in the human women, they enjoyed the safe sex. Even if both fell asleep, no tribal law compelled marriage to those outside the pale.

That night I talked with my guests, as usual, but left them relatively early and walked into the forest. Derab had never made a crawl for me, and I had to give him some instructions.

I stopped just out of earshot of the camp, leaning back comfortably against a huge tree, my rifle in one hand. Several minutes passed. There was no slightest sound, but the shadows in front of me seemed to thicken, grow more solid — and then Derab's head reared up and deliberately moved into a stray beam of moonlight, scarcely my own length away. He was smiling, proud of the fact I had not detected him. Derab was a brash young man, the type who would crawl to the youngest and prettiest women in his first tribe, and be captured within two months. But he was also a tall, very strong man, handsome by human standards, with plenty of the vitality and primitive force jaded women such as Constance came here seeking.

"Hail, Wise Young One," Derab said softly. "Do you have a plump widow who yearns for a night crawler?"

"Greetings, Derab. The woman I have for you is neither plump nor a widow, but it matters not. She is ready. Now I must tell you how to slip beneath the net-that-kills, or you will not crawl again after tonight."

I explained to Derab how he could hold dry sticks in each hand and keep the net from touching his skin as he wriggled beneath. I told him he must be gone in the morning but could return the next night if he pleased the woman and as many nights thereafter as she permitted. And I pointed out the small tent in which Constance slept, explaining that he could not be seen or heard while inside.

"It is as I thought, the fat older one. But who crawls to the mat of the pretty woman, Wise One?"

I felt a fierce and unexpected surge of anger. On Earth, Frances would seem bony compared to her older sister — who was *not* fat — but according to our standards she was the more desirable woman, and Derab obviously preferred her.

"She sleeps alone!" I said firmly. "The slim one would certainly reject you, and you are not to go near her tent. Heed my words!"

Derab's face became bland and disinterested, an expression I could

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see clearly in the tiny beam of moonlight. "As my brother wishes," he said quietly, and turned away. The shadows swallowed him.

I walked back to the camp, lifted the net and carefully replaced it, then stepped to the generator and flipped the detector switch. Derab had best follow my instructions carefully, or this first crawl might well be his last.

I went to bed in the large tent but lay awake long into the night.

Next morning there were small shadows around the eyes of Constance, but she was cheerful and gay. She joked with Jeffrey and Frances, chatted with me, and seemed to have a renewed interest in the forest and its creatures. I had a feeling the sky had been paling when Derab slipped from her air mattress. Evidently the experience had been all that Constance wished. And there was no doubt in my mind that Derab would be welcomed back that night.

Jeffrey also noticed the change. He joked back with Constance, some of it veiled and so personal I could not understand them. Frances grew strangely silent as the by-play continued, becoming introspective and uncommunicative. It seemed obvious she guessed what had happened. I saw her cast several troubled looks in my direction. But when I attempted to speak with her, she acted cool and withdrawn, and I soon left her alone.

After we ate our lunch, Connie and Frances wandered off a short distance together. I saw them get into an animated conversation, with a little arm waving and a few angry gestures. And then Constance said something that seemed to startle Frances. The younger woman paused, then broke into a loud giggle, followed by a fit of laughter. The two sisters suddenly embraced, patting each other on the shoulder and rubbing cheeks. And then they returned to the men, both looking as happy and cheerful as two queen bees in a hive of workers. Whatever was disturbing them had been amicably settled.

And suddenly I understood. Frances thought it had been me who crawled to Constance during the night. And she had been jealous, until Constance told her it was a stranger.

I felt a fierce, exultant joy, so strong I involuntarily broke into song. I went marching down the curving trail, singing an old, old song of love, my pace quickening — until cries of protest brought me to my senses. I slowed and waited for the rest. Frances was mine. I too would crawl tonight.

Jeffrey passed both women and joined me for a few minutes in the lead. He said, "I think the women have finally gotten used to the pace,

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Jay. Notice how cheerful both seem today?"

"Yes, I noticed." Jeffrey puzzled me. It was not like him to be unduly friendly.

"Connie, especially, seems to have finally found her stride," the tall Earthman went on. "Really enjoying it now. Just wanted you to know there will be a nice bonus for you when we get back. Frances still ... uh, has her work to do, but ... you and I can help her with that."

"I will assist Frances in any way possible," I said, trying hard to keep the dislike I felt out of my voice. "As for the bonus, thank you, but that isn't necessary. I am a part-owner of the business."

"Yes, understood. Most everyone can use a little more, though. Buy a few tools for your tribe. Make life easier."

Jeffrey was wrong, but I was not in the mood to explain why my people had to acquire tools very selectively. When I became silent, he paced by me a moment more, then said something about talking to Frances and dropped back. He did not speak to me again that day and spoke only in passing throughout dinner in camp that night.

Constance retired early. Obviously she was exhausted, expected to be awakened, and wanted some sleep first. Jeffrey soon left, apparently to avoid talking to me. Frances and I sat and chatted for an hour, of nothing in particular. She acted warm and friendly, though not flirtatious — that did not seem to be in her nature. Nevertheless, I was certain I would be welcome in her bed that night.

Frances retired, and the camp grew quiet. Although the bearers' tent was not soundproofed, they were accustomed to the night sounds. I sometimes slept outside, and no one would miss me. I lay in the shadow by the side of the large tent and watched the rear of the one where Constance slept the sleep of the tired sensualist. Derab lifted the net and entered the area so quietly that I missed it but did see him sliding across the last three meters to the back of the small tent. He lifted the thin material and wriggled inside. The black edge dropped back to the grass, and they were isolated to enjoy what each had to give.

I stood up, walked slowly to the tent of Frances, reached for the strap — and paused. Some strong and deeply rooted memories surged to the front, clutched at my Earth-trained mind, restrained me. *This is not the way!*

Standing there, bemused, my father's voice came back to me, singing an old, old Song of Knowledge. He sant of the ways of the Great People, of how all tribes were of one blood and custom,

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though scattered in small bands to find food. He told of how every male must take his mate from some other group and bring her home, else the kinship blood grew too close. And he sang of the proper way for a young man to beseech a woman's favor, and that was to crawl to her mat in the dark of night. *He sang of belief, my father, and of being. He sang of running like the long-legged grazers, springing like the sharp-toothed tatara cats who eat them, crawling silently like the snakes. He sang of believing yourself a grazer, a cat, a snake, and of becoming one. He told how to feel the grass under your hooves, the tree limbs beneath your paws, the leaves on your scales. he sang of how all animals were brothers, but the Great People alone could be any animal, could think, could feel, could do what any brother does.*

And this is truth. I have seen a hunter don a grazer's skin and trot easily into a herd, accepted without notice. I have watched a young man put on a saurian's hide and crawl to a riverbank, where he mingled with a group of hungry killers. Every man becomes a warrior by slaying one of the powerful and dangerous beasts in open combat and bringing home his skin — but first he must become that animal's brother.

It is said that Earthmen had this quality once, but for them it has long passed. Now they do not understand it. They say that we have primitive minds, that our grasp on reality is weak, that we cannot distinguish fact from fancy. They say that we only do imitations — and that, more than skin color, is why they call us Bluejays. They believe we only mimic the other animals, as the Bluejay mimics the songs of other birds.

And I, lost between the two worlds — I do not know what to believe.

Feeling somewhat ridiculous, I turned away from the tent. Back in the shadows of the large one where my comrades slept, I shed my clothes. *And with them I shed the culture they had brought, and the softness, and the reasoning mind! I shed down to rigid bone and tightened nerve and quivering muscle. I shed down to my own true soul!*

Like a soft-footed beast of prey, like the mighty *tatara* himself, I stalked to the edge of the net behind the tent of Frances. Then down on my knees, on my hands, on my belly — and smooth and swift and silent as a snake seeking a rodent in the tall grass, crawled toward the mat of she whom I desired.

There was no one to see, no one to hear. No stern father awaited his daughter's cry for aid when a suitor would not leave, no brother slept

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next door to protect a widowed sister. It would not matter to Frances if I walked in the front rather than slipped under the back. Yet I had to make the crawl.

My body was throbbing with lust. At that moment I could have spread my arms like wings and flown with the birds, run with the fastest grazer, swum like the very fish. I knew potency, and power, and the strength of mighty hunters. I knew what it meant to be a man.

The tent loomed ahead, darker than the night behind me. I raised the loose edge, saw the air mattress, moved to one side, and crawled within. Darkness enveloped me, a pitch-blackness deeper than ever was brought by storm or night.

In the nothing in which I moved came a soft pleased chuckle, and a hand found my shoulder, groped to my face. There was a rustle of bedclothes, and the hand moved to my arm, pulling me toward her. I slid onto a firm but resilient surface, and into strong but tender arms.

Later — it seemed hours later, night later, but could only have been minutes — Frances said, "Now I see what Constance was after."

I had been living in the minds of my ancestors, reason abandoned, judgment fled. I lay by her side, not wanting to talk. A crawler never speaks; relatives lie snoring on the next mat. But her words brought me back, at least partially, into the world of civilization.

After a moment, very low, I said, "That was my first crawl to a woman."

"Your *first?* Well, believe me, no one would ever guess!"

I had known what to do because my father had taught me, in many old songs. And I had done it. But conversation served to distract, to drag me further into the present. At that moment I wanted to be pure sensation, a body living only for itself, for pleasure. I was young, and strong, and already the juices were heating up again. I felt that pleasant stir at the base of the spine, a sense of gathering tension. I reached for Frances, pulled her into my arms for a long kiss. She gave a muffled cry of surprise to find me ready again so soon, sought my body with greedy hands — and the tent flap unzipped with a hissing sibilance, opened, and a tall figure stooped to enter.

No ray of light could flash between the walls that gave out darkness, but Jeffrey Dalton was still outside the tent. I saw him clearly, hair tousled, eyes lowered as he started in. He was dressed in only his underwear. As the tent flap fell in place behind him and he turned to zip it down, he said, "Awake, lovebird? I fell asleep

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waiting for the camp to quiet down."

"Jeff! Not tonight! I told you earlier, I'm not in the mood! Please, go back to your tent!"

"Not in the *mood?* That isn't the way you talked when you asked for this trip. Come on, now." As he spoke Jeffrey turned and knelt by the bed, reaching — and his hands fell on my head and chest.

"Wha...oh, *damn* you, woman! A slut like your sister, after all! I thought you ..." and then Jeffrey Dalton taught me that Earthmen too could revert to the primitive. The hands moved to my throat, closed with convulsive strength. He hurled himself on me, trying to hold me down with his heavier body.

For a moment I did not resist. A crawler never fights if the relatives awake, if the father or brother chooses to throw him out of the hut. And the human part of me was still stunned by what I had learned, the knowledge this woman I had thought strong and independent was a chattel to Dalton money.

Frances screamed, a shrill cry that jarred me back to life.

I seized Jeffrey's wrists, tried to pull his hands apart. He gave a low angry grunt and held tight. Bright sparks started flying before my eyes, red flashes careening across a swelling cloud of fire. I flailed at his head; he lowered it and butted the top into my face. Blood spurted from my nose.

It was fight or die. I wriggled to the side, until one knee was free of his weight, bent my leg, and planted that knee in his ribs. Twisting, I heaved with all my might. He slid off me, but the killing hands stayed at my throat. I managed to turn on my side, brought up both feet, and caught him at the hips. With all my fading strength I pushed us apart.

Jeffrey went one way and I the other. He hit the side of the tent, the death grip finally torn away. I took a great gulp of life-giving air, even as I rolled over Frances and hit the opposite wall. She screamed again and once more as the double impact brought the tent down on us.

I scrambled about for a few seconds, seeking the edge of the cloth, then found it and slipped beneath. When I stood up it was to see Jeffrey rising on the opposite side, Frances sitting up on the mattress but still caught beneath the tent. And then Jeffrey charged at me, knocking Frances aside as he came, bellowing like a maddened bull from his native Earth. And this time there was no night-black cloth around us to soak up the noise.

I let him get past Frances, then took a quick step to the side and hit him in the stomach with all my

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might. He started to double up, caught himself, and threw a hard punch at my head as he straightened. It caught me on the temple, and suddenly I was on the ground, dizzy, watching with blurred eyes as the bearers came spilling out of their tent.

Instead of following me at once, Jeffrey bent over, groped a moment, and came erect with a large limb in his hands. As he started toward me, I sprang to my feet and scurried backward, looking about for a similar weapon. Jeffrey charged again, swinging the stick at my head, yelling at the top of his lungs. I was faster than he and dodged; it scraped my shoulder. He whirled and followed, drawing back for another stroke. I leaped to one side, jumped again when he turned to follow, reversed myself and ran almost at him. He tried to stop and turn for another blow, but I reached him first.

Jeffrey Dalton's large muscles were nothing but well-placed fat. He was a slow and awkward man. One of our young boys could have beaten him in a game of switches. I caught him with one arm across his soft middle and a leg behind his ankles, sending him crashing to the ground.

Bluejays seldom fight with each other. That is not our custom. It was my training on Earth, where I learned the ancient art of wrestling, that I used against Jeffrey. He was partially stunned by the hard fall, but rolled over and got quickly to his feet. I let him rise — then hit him in the belly with my shoulder, caught him around the waist, and lifted his heavy form off the ground.

And it was that part of me that came from Earth that caused me to take four running steps, and heave the collapsing body of my enemy at the nearest section of the guard net.

Jeffrey fell backward as the loosely hanging strands yielded to his weight, trying desperately to regain his balance. He finally got his feet on the ground and tried to stand up. He succeeded, but the current was swiftly increasing while he stayed in contact, building to a deadly charge. When he tried to pull away his leg muscles were paralyzed.

Jeffrey screamed. The scream faded to a whine, a gasp, a desperate gulp for air. And then his face turned dark, the tongue started to extrude, the eyes bulged — and I turned and walked leisurely toward the generator. As my hand moved toward the switch, I glanced back, to be certain he was dead — and then turned off power to the net.

The slack body fell limply to the ground. I walked back and stood staring down at the blackened face of my former employer. A slim

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figure dashed past me and knelt by his side. Frances, still nude, cradled the limp head in her arms. When she realized he was dead, she slowly looked up at me. The six bearers had all come to stand just behind us, puzzled and upset by this unprecedented fight.

"You — you murderer! I'll — you're an *animal!* I'll tell them what you did, you —" and then Frances seemed to remember where she was and paused, biting her lip. I saw sudden fear for her own life appear on her face. Then she burst into helpless sobbing and turned back to her dead lover, the tears falling on his uncaring face.

"Takab, Ahmo — arouse Derab from his soft bed and send him on his way. Then take these two and the dead man back to Quigsby Station. Guard the women well, and touch them not. I charge you with their care."

My brethren nodded, their eyes big and solemn. I walked to the harmless net, passed under, and let it fall behind me. With it I let slip from my shoulders the burden of being a human, became again one of the Great People, a son of Terti, a member of the Tribe of Asab.

My tribe lived too close to the station. The humans would come seeking me there. I returned to them only long enough to bid my family farewell and to take back from Shasi this notebook in which I write. She will not need it now. No one will be teaching her how to read marks on paper.

I must make my way into the continent's interior, to the furthest, least known tribe of the Great People. There I will live out my life. It will be hard to forget civilization, the joy of books, the pleasure of music, the many worlds of imagination created by the artists of Earth. Always a part of my soul will be captive there. Better it would be had I never known that other life, never left my native world.

I will send this notebook to Grant Sutton, that he may know why I killed Jeffrey Dalton when I could have let him live. It was the human in me. The Great People kill only animals. I must strive to again be worthy of them.

This is my English song. The song is ended.

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Though John Sladek has proved himself a superior impressionist with the recent parodies in these pages, he has always had a distinctive sf voice of his own, as demonstrated in the new story below.

The Face

by JOHN SLADEK

"God had given you one face, and you make yourselves another."

I must try to tell this impartially, with a scientific concern for truth. It is not my story, after all. I played only a small part at the end.

Yet the end, in a way, returns to the beginning. This story is a snake swallowing its own tail.

Is the tape recording? My name is James P. Anderson, and I am — was a lab technician working for the special project. My work was trivial, for I have very little formal scientific training.

Not that I'm ignorant. You pick up things, here and there. I've been reading about the lives of great scientists. I know, for one thing, how August Kekulé discovered the chemical structure of benzene. Not too many chemists know that. He found it in a dream.

I keep dreaming that someone is trying to tear off my face. The doctor says that's just the healing and tightening of new tissue, nothing to worry about.

Kekulé dreamed of snakes, circling and biting their own tails. That's how he discovered the benzene ring. Snakes....

The three boys who found the object in Hill Park were, they say, hunting for garter snakes. The Barnes boy said that at first they all thought the object was a rubber mask lying in the grass. But his friends said they knew at once that it was "something weird." What is the truth here?

They experimented, trying to turn it over with sticks. They bruised it and scratched the cheek, which bled. Barnes and Schmidt later claimed it was the third boy, Dalston, who committed "most" of these injuries. By way of appeasement, they brought the object

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offerings of fresh floweres. Finally Barnes told his parents. Barnes senior, a water inspector, visited the site and immediately called the police.

The police report speaks of the object as "face of a partly buried Caucasion, sex unknown." According to medical examiner, the person was unconscious: "Respiration shallow, estimated temperature subnormal, pulse slow. Pupils dilated. The mouth could not be opened."

The discovery was unusual enough for the evening papers, who headlined it as *Live Burial Mystery.* A few reporters hung around the site, waiting for the police to uncover the rest of the supposed person.

A few minutes after the digging started, it stopped. The police held a whispered conference and then cleared the reporters from the area. That night they put up steel barriers and canvas screens.

Newsmen could only guess at what was happening by the comings and goings of important men: city officials, army officers and medical specialists. The morning papers guessed wildly that the buried person was a spy, a "living bomb," a plague victim. In the evening editions the story was killed.

It was killed in this case by unofficial pressure — friendly phone calls from certain government offices to city editors. For this reason, reporters felt free to continue chasing down leads.

One man (Cobb of the *Sentinel*) made two discoveries that led in the right direction. He talked to a homicide detective who admitted being puzzled by the undisturbed grass around the face. In his opinion, no one had been digging there for months.

Secondly, a park gardener said he was surprised to hear of a burial in that spot, high on the side of the hill.

"The soil's thin there," he said. "Bedrock's only three or four inches down."

Cobb continued digging. He asked the boys if they'd noticed anything unusual when they'd found the face. Two hadn't, and the Schmidt boy (obviously enjoying his sudden fame) now recalled noticing all too much: The face had a third eye, it gave off an eerie blue glow, blood on the lips, etc., etc.

Finally, Cobb talked to one of the rescue workers who'd been digging for the body.

"Everywhere we went down, we struck rock. I didn't know it was rock right away. I thought maybe the guy was wearing a suit of armor or something, see? Anyway, I dug down around the head, and more rock. I says, hell, where is the rest of this guy?

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"So then I got down with a trowel, cleared the soil around the head, and got my hand under it, see, to lift it up. So I'm like this, see, with my right hand under the head and my left on the face. I can feel the guy's breath on the back of my hand. I start to lift, and then I look.

"I couldn't believe it. I can feel the guy's breath. I'm lifting, and I'm looking right where the guy's brain ought to be. And I'm seeing a handful of roots and dirt, with slugs and things crawling around in it. *There's no back to his head.* Just a face!"

Slugs and things. Any chance of heading off public hysteria was now gone. Wire services repeated Cobb's story, heating it up. Within hours, police and army spokesmen had denied it, confirmed it and refused to comment. The medical examiner cleared his throat and admitted to sixty million viewers that, well, yes, he would have to say the face was alive, in a way. Medically speaking. Well, yes, it was breathing. And, no, he had no explanation at the moment. But the experts were no doubt looking into it....

The *experts?* How many experts could there be on bodiless living faces? Within days, however, there were dozens of expert opinions in the air. A botanist said the thing was no human face at all, but a peculiar species of mushroom. (He hadn't actually seen it when he said this.) A famous plastic surgeon spoke of little-known advances in transplants. A zoologist spoke of protective camouflage. A religious leader mentioned the imprint of Christ's face on the veil of Veronica. Everyone spoke of the veil of secrecy that was keeping back the truth from the public.

In time, the government allowed a few photos to be published. The face was variously identified as Lincoln, Gandhi, Martin Bormann, Amelia Earhart....

By now citizens in every part of the nation were spotting faces in their back yards, especially in the shadows of foliage. Others scanned the sky and found faces in the clouds, which they connected with the imminent flying saucer invasion. Unscrupulous or uncaring magazines dug up the fantasies of the Schmidt boy. By the end of the month, even the newsmen were getting tired of calls from spirit mediums ("I have contacted the Face by Ouija. It is Christian and vegetarian..."), from pranksters ("Listen, I got this rose growing in my window box...") and from prophets of doom. One day the *Sentinel* editor threw out letters from three people claiming the Face as their own, one man from Mars, and one man who explained that the Face was controlling his

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thoughts by means of a "death dream laser." The editor then wrote an open letter asking for a special Presidential Commission to investigate:

> We've had enough of official silence and scientific double-talk. The public is concerned and alarmed. The only way to put a stop to the crank letters and Halloween-mask hoaxes is to answer these questions: What is the Face? Where did it come from? How did it get planted in the park? Is it human and conscious? Can it speak? Can it think?

Actually a special project was already set up to investigate the object. Not appointed by the President or Congress (who were probably afraid of looking foolish), but by the Office of Naval Research jointly with University Hospital. As a lab technician from the hospital, I played a humble part in the project. My duties were washing glassware and reading dials. Dull work, yes. But necessary.

I arrived in town the day of the open letter. I cut it out of the *Sentinel* and pinned it on my wall at "home." I intended to check off the editor's questions one by one, as we found the answers.

"Home" for now was a disused army barracks on the edge of the city, where most of the staff were quartered. I pinned up the letter and took a bus straight to Hill Park, hoping to glimpse the object itself. I didn't even stop to unpack, which is why I forgot to bring my pass.

It was a warm June day, 27°C. Most of the people on my bus seemed to be headed for the beach. As I later learned, most of them had no jobs to go to. I stepped off the bus and stood shading my eyes to look up at the hill in Hill Park. Near the top they were setting up the metal walls of our laboratory. The park gates were closed and guarded by two Marines. Too late, I remembered the pass in my suitcase.

As I stood there, a man wearing a white armband with crude lettering on it handed me a leaflet.

"I haven't got any change," I said.

"It's free," he said. "Read it, mister. Find out what the Face really means. Come to our rally tonight and hear the truth."

"The truth?"

"The *real* truth. Not what these government bastards want us to believe. The truth they're afraid of."

I didn't tell him I was working for the government bastards; it would only have provoked him. He stared at me until I smiled and put the leaflet in my pocket. I forgot all about it for the time being.

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From the window of the bus back to the barracks, I saw several wall graffiti I didn't understand. But they all seemed to refer to the object. One was a face divided by a bolt of lightning. One was a face surrounded by sun rays. I remember these two only because I've seen them so often since, but there were many others. The object in the park had already become the focus of several movements, both political and mystical. Most of them, like the Society of the Peaceful Face, the American Vigilante Volunteers and the Space Brotherhood, either disbanded or merged, but anyhow dropped out of sight. Only two evolved and lived on.

The Guardians of the Mask emphasized the fact that the object was a *white* face. They believed it to be only part of the body to come. Any day now, the hands would turn up in, say, Britain and the feet in Scandinavia and the rest in other Caucasian countries. (Medical students often played cruel tricks with these pathetic hopes.) Finally the complete Messiah-Fuhrer would assemble himself and lead them into the final racial Armageddon, in which all but the white race would certainly die.

The New Universologists, on the other hand, believed the object to be an oracle. They reckoned it had now been sleeping for nearly a thousand years. Soon it would awaken, to tell them what to do next, to achieve a world of lasting peace and brotherhood.

Normally both movements might have appealed only to a fringe of unhappy people, but these were far from normal times. The nation was undergoing great economic and political upheavals, and the government almost daily proved itself unequal to the problems of unemployment and unrest. Both movements attracted thousands in this city alone, and perhaps hundreds of thousands more were sympathetic to their causes. Other cities were close behind.

The Communist Party saw which way the wind blew and lent some support to the New Universologists (NU) to help them organize. In return, over the next few months, the NU began to lay more stress on workers' control of industry and less on miracles. Reacting, ultraconservative groups threw in their lot — and their considerable money — with the Guardians of the Mask (GM). Up and down the country there were demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, rallies and rally smashers. And a sense of urgency. A sense that power was now within reach of those who most needed it. Power was just inside the gates of Hill Park.

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Or so they must have thought. At different times, both groups tried storming the park to rescue their idol. The police, even with state police reinforcements were almost overwhelmed by the second attack. Next day the edge of the park was barricaded with sandbags, and several hundred Marines were billeted inside. From now on until the end of our project, no one could ever be allowed to come into the park.

The end of our project? It dragged its long, slow serpent's body through the summer, with no end in sight. One day in October I looked up at the news clipping on my wall. Not a single vital question had been answered. We knew nothing important, and it looked as though we never would. Our work had disintegrated into endless proofs and disproofs of secondary theories. The serpent had no end, it had swallowed itself, and now chewed on itself...

Who am I, a lab technician, to make this judgment? I speak not of the scientific facts, but of the human differences within the project. I wasn't just washing glassware and reading dials, not all the time. I kept my eyes open.

There was a fundamental split from the very beginning, between Dr. Lowell, our project director, and Dr. Grauber, head of the medical section. The medical people wanted to move the object to University Hospital and place it under intensive care. Dr. Lowell supported the biologists who argued against this, saying that it might be dangerous to uproot it from its present environment. Dr. Grauber replied that this was entirely a medical decision, hence his to make. Dr. Lowell said that depended entirely on whether or not the object was truly human.

"How on earth can we find out what it is unless we get it into a proper laboratory? Do you expect my men to do biopsies out *here?*" Grauber had to stand on tiptoe to shout this into Lowell's face. The director was a head taller than Grauber and, like many big men, bland and almost friendly in an argument. He liked to pose as a big jolly absent-minded professor, slow of speech and always fishing for his pipe in one pocket of his baggy tweed jacket. In reality he was a ruthless executive. Whatever he knew or didn't know about science, he knew how to command. Most of us came to respect him, even like him.

Grauber was generally unliked. I knew him from the hospital, where they called him Napoleon. A cold, logical little man, a brilliant scientist, but he threw tantrums when he didn't get his way.

He tore off his pince-nez and shook them under Lowell's nose —

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as though he wanted to shake a fist at him. "Is that what you expect? Is it? Is it?"

Lowell sighed. "Dr. Gráuber, I expect you to follow my direction. We'll get along better if you do, okay?"

It was not okay. The arguments grew worse as the project dragged on through the summer. The staff were all upset; we all found ourselves taking sides. I would hear:

"Grauber just wants to get control of the project himself. So he wants to drag the thing off to his own lab, and then gradually ease Lowell out of the driver's seat. I've seen his kind before."

"Are you crazy? Grauber's ten times the scientist Lowell ever will be. And I'll tell you something else. He really cares about that 'thing' out there. It's no 'thing' to him, it's a human being in need of medical treatment."

There was something in both sides; I didn't know what to believe. After one shattering evening of this, I quit work early. I had to drag myself on the bus, and then I sat with closed eyes, wishing away my throbbing headache. The engine vibration and bright lights were still getting through to me. So finally I got out and walked.

It was quiet and dark. Just my footstaps and the streetlights. I noticed my headache going.

Then I turned a corner and found myself at a rally of the New Universologists. There were maybe fifty people listening and one white-haired man speaking from the back of a pickup truck. The banner behind him said THE FACE OF PEACE and showed the sun-ray symbol. Most of the people looked poor, but more or less respectable. One exception was the dirty unshaven man who was taking pictures.

"...a face of peace," said the speaker. "Brothers, do you know what peace means? Do any of us know? Have they ever let us find out? Not a chance.

"Of course peace will be hard on some people. Think of all those rich arms manufacturers that'll have to go out and get an honest job! Think of all the generals who might have to work for a living! Think of the paid-off politicians who get a piece of every big arms contract — on relief! We all know who's against peace, don't we? *And they've got a steel ring around Hill Park right now!*

"What are they so afraid of, brothers? I'll tell you..."

But he never did tell us, for just then a man in a Halloween mask jumped up and pulled him down off the truck. There were more men in masks with baseball bats, hitting people in the front of the crowd.

Someone screamed, "GMs!"

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We ran. I looked back from a safe distance. Two of the invaders were kicking the white-haired man as he lay in the street. Others were trying to turn over the truck. My headache was back, and now I felt sick to my stomach besides.

At work the Grauber-Lowell arguments went on. Medical staff monitered the object's temperature, pulse and respiration (dials for me to read), all below normal. They took tissue samples (a biopsy) and found it had human flesh. Radiologists found that the face contained normal human face bones and teeth. The jaw was fused, unworkable. Three of the teeth had metal fillings. All this enabled Grauber to say:

"It's human, for God's sake! It's in a coma. Probably dying!"

"*Part*-human,"-Lowel replied, lighting his pipe. "A symbiosis, I think. And we're in a unique position to study it in its natural environment. Let's not plop it in a hospital bed just yet, shall we?"

And there was evidence for his side, too. The back of the object was connected to the soil through masses of tiny threadlike roots. Vegetation seemingly living in symbiosis with a human face. Just how the two worked together was unclear. An ultrasonic probe showed clusters of tiny sacs attached to some of these roots. The sacs pulsated together, providing the object's pseudobreathing.

Everyone took sides but me. I tried hard to stay impartial, to wait for the final blaze of truth. At home I tried not to notice the yellowed clipping on the wall. None of the questions were checked off. We knew nothing.

The last week of October was the worst. Dr. Grauber said that the first frost might kill the object, whether or not it was human. Dr. Lowell agreed, but argued for moving it to a greenhouse, not a hospital. All over town there were cryptic notices of a massive GM procession on Halloween, "Night of the Mask." Police leave was canceled for that night, and still more Marines were brought in. When I arrived for work at dusk, I saw them setting up machine guns on the barricades. *Ring of steel,* I thought. *And for what?*

Someone said Dr. Grauber wanted to see me. While I waited outside his office, I could hear him and Lowell arguing.

"You admit you know nothing of medicine, Dr. Lowell. You're a biologist. You know about as much about medicine as I know about — pogonophorae."

"Certainly. But I don't see —"

"Then I'll spell it out for you. The face is human, or part-human. If he dies, because you've disregarded medical advice — good advice — that's murder."

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"Oh, come now. You can't —"

"I can. I'll have you arrested, Dr. Lowell. And brought to trial."

"You'll never prove it's human."

"No, you'll probably get off. But think of the headlines. Think of what the publicity will mean to your precious career."

"Goddamn you," said Lowell pleasantly. "I almost think you would, too. Still, I can always fire you."

There was a loud click. When Lowell came out, he was putting the broken pieces of his pipe in his pocket. He looked worried, but when he saw me, he smiled.

"Next patient," he said.

Grauber looked sick. He was polishing his pince-nez furiously, perhaps to disguise the trembling of his hands.

"Ah, Anderson is it?" He never remembered the names or faces of his staff. "Sit down, Anderson. I have some rather bad news for you."

I sat down. "What is it, Doctor?"

"The FBI came to see me earlier, to tell me you're a security risk."

"What? Me?"

"They showed me a photograph of you at some rally. One of these oddball groups that keeps trying to smash their way into the park. And they searched your room at the barracks and found a certain leaflet."

"But I can explain —"

He held up a hand. "I'm sure you can. I'm sure you can. But not to me. I don't understand these new political things. *They* say you must go, so go you must. I am sorry. Of course we'll try to keep you on at the hospital, if we can. I'm sure you mean us no harm."

"No harm? No *harm?*" When I got outside, I had to laugh. It's said August Kekulé laughed when he awoke from his dream to understand the benzene ring. In the words of the song:

Then I awoke.

Was this some kind of joke?

It was, and the joke was on me. I had worked four months for the project, washing glassware, reading dials. Keeping an open mind, not taking sides. Waiting for the blaze of truth. And the truth was *I had never laid eyes on the Face itself.*

Well, now was the time. I could see the great GM procession coming up the hill to the park, thousands on thousands of tiny lights like the glittering scales of one huge snake. Pointing to the truth in the park. Over there, in that little tent. What would they do, if they broke in? Carry it away? Fall down and worship, pressing their hideous masks to the ground? Too many questions (Can it speak? Can it think?) and no answers.

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I thought of Kekulés dream again. Was there another meaning? The snake devours its tail. All things must turn back to their origins. The circle is zero. Ashes to ashes....

I took a 500 ml. bottle of benzene from the lab, where I had used it to clean the glassware. Kekulés benezene, the big zero. When I tore open the flaps of the little tent, I could hardly make out the Face. Just a lighter oval in the darkness. I poured the bottle of benzene on it and ignited it. They tell me there was an explosion. My face was burned, and I have lost my sight.

But I have seen enough.

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ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

Because I am an occasional writer of light verse, and a punster, and also an egocentric, I am sometimes compelled to do something clever (if I can) with my name. Thus, in my poem "The Prime of Life" (F & SF, October 1966), I needed an internal rhyme and I wanted to use my name, and so I had some young fan meet me and say:

"Why, stars above, it's Asimov."

I thought that was a natural, unforced line and I quoted it sometimes when I wanted to impress someone with my skill at light verse. I did so once to a fair damsel, and she gave it some five seconds of thought and said, "Why didn't you say —

"Why, mazel-tov, it's Asimov."

It took me some fifteen minutes of speechless chagrin before I recovered. Her version was much better of course, for "mazel-tov" (as I perhaps need not tell you) is the Hebrew phrase for "good luck." It is much more humorously appropriate for several reasons — and I had never thought of it.

The cleverest use of my name, however, was not by myself, but by J. Wayne Sadler of Jacksonville, Florida. Last December, he sent me

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a verse (into which I introduced two or three tiny changes) and here it is:

When Isaac's at a nudist camp
He promptly joins the fun,
For "When in Rome" 's his favorite quote
As he tells every one.
So when the signal's given out,
"All clothing you must doff."
Without a moment's hesitation,
Isaac Asimov.

Ah, well, I've never been in a nudist camp, but I often feel that, thanks to my personal style of writing, I live in a mental nudist camp. There can be no one who reads me regularly who isn't completely aware of my opinions and feelings on almost any subject. Still, let me state, if you can possibly have missed it, that I am a free thinker in religion.

In particular, since this will appear in the Christmas season, I must explain that I do not accept as accurate the nativity tales that appear in the gospels. As to their theological value, or their allegorical symbolism, or what not, I have nothing to say; I am not a theologian. I do not accept them, however, as portrayals of the literal truth, anymore than I accept Genesis 1.

My own feeling is that the tales of the nativity were devised after the fact, and in many ways follow the tradition of the nativity tales that were told of earlier legendary (or not-so-legendary) leaders who founded nations or religions: Sargon of Agade, Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Remus, and so on.

The oldest of the four gospels, Mark, contains no nativity tale at all, but begins with the baptism of a mature Jesus. The youngest of the four gospels, John, has no human nativity tale because Jesus had, in a way, gotten beyond that by then. Instead it contains a treatment of Jesus as a manifestation of God and as co-eternal with him.

That leaves us with two Gospels of intermediate age, Matthew and Luke, each of which contains a nativity tale — but a different one. The two do not overlap at any single point; anything contained in one nativity tale is omitted in the other.

Thus, the story of the star that shone at the time of the birth of Jesus is found only in the Gospel of St. Matthew and does *not* occur in any form in the Gospel of St. Luke. Indeed, the star is not referred to anywhere in the New Testament but in the first part of the second chapter of Matthew.

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The whole story of this star is to be found in five verses, and here they are as the King James version has it:

Matthew 2:1 *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.*

Matthew 2:2. *Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

This interests King Herod, who wants no pretender to the throne and who would naturally expect any so-called Messiah to stir up rebellions. He summons his advisers, then sends for the wise men.

Matthew 2:7. *Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.*

Herod then instructs the wise men to find the child and report back to him.

Matthew 2:9. *When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.*

Matthew 2:10. *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

Because this star shone above the place of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (wherever in the town that might have been, for the story of the manger is found only in Luke), it is usually referred to as "The Star of Bethlehem."

The Star of Bethlehem is one of the few matters in the Bible that seems to be astronomical in nature, and it has therefore been the subject of a great deal of speculation, from the astronomical viewpoint. And, to tell you the truth, speculating about the Star of Bethlehem is my kind of game, too, so I would like to present you with no less than nine alternatives.

It might be, for instance, (*alternative 1*) that the Star of Bethlehem is not amenable to any astronomical explanation and rests indeed, outside the realm of reason altogether. It may represent a "mystery" (in the religious sense of the word) that human beings cannot understand without divine inspiration. Perhaps only in Heaven can the full meaning dawn. In that case, clearly, there is no use in speculating. We can do nothing but wait for inspiration or for arrival in Heaven, and, alas, neither is likely to happen to me.

It might also be (*alternative 2*) that the Star of Bethlehem is beyond explanation, not for theological reasons, but simply because it is a pious invention on the part of the writer of the Gospel.

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This is not to say that it is a deliberate lie or a purposeful attempt to deceive. The tale of the star may have been in the air, as one of the standard indications of divinity at birth — just as angelic voices and halos might be — and the author made use of it, as a suitable and fitting detail.

Remember that Matthew was probably putting together his gospel some time after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.; in other words, three-quarters of a century after the birth of Jesus. There were no records of the past in the modern sense, and he could only gather vague tales. There may have been stories of some star-like phenomenon having taken place at about the time of Jesus' birth, and Matthew felt it would be appropriate to include it.

We might ask why Matthew was impressed by the tales of the star which he heard, and wanted to include it, when Luke didn't. Actually, we can advance a plausible reason for this. From external evidence, we can argue that Luke was a Gentile, telling the Gospel story to Gentiles, while Matthew was a Jew telling the story to Jews.*

It is natural, then, for Matthew to present as many details as possible that bear out some Old Testament prophecy or other since this would impress his Jewish audience. Sometimes he cites the Old Testament verses that contain the prophecy, but even when he doesn't we might look for one.

At one point in the Old Testament, for instance, Balaam is described as making the following prophecy at the time that the Israelite tribes are preparing, east of the Jordan, to invade Canaan:

Numbers 24:17. *I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*

It is very likely that this verse was written during the time of the Judean Kingdom and was included as part of the words of the legendary sage, Balaam. (It was common in ancient times to place words in the mouths of ancient worthies.)

The assumption is that the "him" is King David, who did defeat Moab and conquer all the surrounding kingdoms. It is because of this verse that the two interlocked equilateral triangles are referred to as "the Star of David."

**Your are welcome to refer to my book "Asimov's Guide to the Bible, Volume Two, the New Testament" (Doubleday, 1969) if you wish. I don't insist.*

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After the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah and the end of the Davidic dynasty, the verse was re-interpreted. The world "him" was taken as referring to a future king of the Davidic dynasty, the Messiah ("anointed one," a phrase commonly used by the Jews to refer to a king). Matthew naturally accepted it as such and would suppose that a star would make a particularly fit association with the birth of the Messiah.

Then, too, there is a passage in Isaiah that describes a Utopia to come. One verse goes:

Isaiah 60:3. *And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*

The reference is to the ideal Israel that is to rise in the future, but it is easy to transfer that reference to the Messiah, and the words "light" and "brightness of thy rising" could refer to a star. The word "Gentiles" may be taken to refer to the wise men from the east.

So influential is the Isaiah verse, with its reference to "kings" as well as "gentiles," that the legend arose that the wise men were three kings named Melchior, Gaspar and Balthazar. In medieval times, relics of the three were supposed to exist at the Cologne Cathedral, so that they came to be called "The Three Kings of Cologne." All this is, of course, quite non-Biblical. The Bible does not call them kings and does not even say there were three of them.

But what if Matthew did base the tale of the star on some legend current at the time the Gospel was being put together, and what if the legend reflected something that had actually happened?

We might (*alternative 3*) suppose that whatever the star was, it was a miraculous object and not something that could be seen in the ordinary course of events or by everybody. It might, in fact, have been visible only to the wise men and have indeed served as their miraculous guide. Once it had reached the infant Jesus and stood over him, it disappeared.

We might argue in favor of this by pointing out that Herod, who would be expected to be keenly interested in any sign that might indicate the birth of a rival to his throne, knew nothing about the star and had to inquire of the wise men concerning it.

But if the star is a miracle created for this one task and seen by only the people who had to see it, further investigation must stop here, so let's proceed to further alternatives.

Let us suppose that the star, whatever it was, was not miraculous, but was real, and was something that could be visible to anyone who looked. This, indeed, is the assumption that most people make when they try to

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work out what the Star of Bethlehem might have been.

In any alternative arising from this assumption, however, we must forget about the star guiding the wise men and standing over Jesus. That is clearly miraculous and must be omitted if a rational explanation is sought. We must simply suppose that something appeared in the sky which seemed to betoken the birth of a Messiah, and no more than that.

We are helped in this, however, by the fact that the term "star" had a much wider meaning to the ancients than to ourselves. We consider planets and comets to be non-stars, for instance, but to the ancients they were "wandering stars" and "hairy stars" respectively. To the ancients, any heavenly object would be considered a star, so let's search for one in the broadest possible way.

For instance, the heavenly phenomenon referred to as a star by Matthew may actually have been (*alternative 4*) a subtle astronomical fact that was real enough, but would not be apparent to anyone but specialists in the field.

The wise men might well have been considered specialists in the field. The term as used in Matthew is an English translation of the Greek word "magoi," which is, in turn, from "magus" the name given by the ancient Persians to Zoroastrian priests.

To the Greeks and Romans, the term referred to any eastern mystic. To the Romans, "magus" (plural "magi") came to mean "sorcerer," and our present English words "magic" and "magician" come from the Persian "magus."

The most likely people to be interested in heavenly phenomena were, of course, astrologers, and they would come under the heading of magi. Babylonia was an ancient center of astrology, and so the wise men might easily have been astrologers from that land, which lies east of Judea.

And what could the astrologers have seen that was apparent to them, and real, but which ordinary people could not see?

It so happens that the position of the Sun at the time of the vernal equinox is of importance to astrologers. This position is always in the Zodiac but is not fixed. It very slowly shifts from one of the twelve constellations of the Zodiac to the next, taking about 2000 years to pass completely through one constellation (see my article SIGNS OF THE TIMES, September 1973).

For the 2,000 years prior to the birth of Jesus, the Sun at the time of the vernal equinox had been in the constellation of Aries (the Ram). Now, however, it was more or less on the point of moving into the constellation

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of Pisces (the Fish.) To astrologers this would be a most vital event and might well be thought to represent some basic upset in human events. Since the Judeans of the time were constantly talking of the arrival of a Messiah, who would establish a new Jerusalem and reorganize human history (as in the Isaiah passage), astrologers might conclude that would be it — and go to Judea to investigate the matter.

It is interesting in this connection that the early Christians used a fish as a secret symbol of the Messiah. The usual explanation is that the letters of the Greek word for "fish," taken in order, were initials of a Greek phrase which, translated, is "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." Yet it might also be that the fish referred to Pisces, into which the vernal equinox had now passed.

Yet the point of vernal equinox is not visible; it is only calculated. Matthew clearly speaks of a visible star. To be sure, this might only be because Matthew, no astrologer, misunderstood what it was all about. Still, we can't know that. Suppose we decide that Matthew was right and that the star was a visible phenomenon. What then?

The star might, in that case, (*alternative 5*) have been a comet. Comets appear irregularly and unpredictably (at least as far as the ancients were concerned) and move erratically across the sky. It so happens that the most famous of them all, Halley's Comet, was in the sky in 11 B.C., which is seven years before the traditional date given for the birth of Jesus, but that traditional date rests on shaky ground.

Yet Halley's Comet is *too* noticeable. Comets are visible to all and were generally taken to portend world-shaking events. If the wise men came from the east talking of a star representing the birth of a Messiah, everyone would know at once what they were talking about, and Herod wouldn't have to inquire what it was all about.

The same objection might be raised, less strongly, to (*alternative 6*) the presence of a supernova in the sky, one shining brightly in a position no star had ever before occupied, and therefore signifying something great and new. It would not have been as noticeable as a comet, as far as the general population was concerned, but it is not likely to have gone without comment altogether and we have no record anywhere of any supernova appearing anywhere around that time of history, nor any trace in the sky today that one might then have appeared.*

**Arthur C. Clarke wrote a story "The Star" which appeared in the November 1955 issue of* Infinity Science Fiction *and which was awarded a Hugo in 1956. It is* the *Star of Bethlehem story and, if you don't believe me, I urge you to read it in my anthology "the Hugo Winners."*

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Failing a comet or a supernova, the star might have been (*alternative 7*) a reference to the brightest normal object in the sky, next to the Sun and Moon — the planet, Venus. This seems, however, in the highest degree unlikely, although some people have maintained it as a possibility. After all, Venus is a common object in the sky, and there is no way that it could reasonably be expected to indicate something special at one time rather than another. The same is true to an even greater extent of any other single planet or star in the sky.

What about (*alternative 8*) a bright meteorite? That has an advantage over a comet, a supernova, or a bright planet, in that it is a restricted phenomenon. It is located in the upper atmosphere and can be seen only over a very limited portion of the Earth's surface.

The wise men could have seen the "star" in the east, as they announced, in the sky of their own Babylonian area. It would not have been visible elsewhere, and particularly not in Judea. We could then understand how it was that Herod had to inquire about it.

The difficulty here is whether a simple meteorite coming and going would strike astrologers as sufficiently unusual in itself to indicate the coming of a Messiah. In the clear air of Babylonia, there are undoubtedly meteors to be seen every night, and even if this one were particularly bright, so what? If the meteor had actually reached Earth's surface and become a meteorite, the wise men would have been more impressed, provided they had witnessed the fall and found the meteorite, but then would they not have talked of something falling from heaven?

We have run out of the ordinary celestial phenomena that could account for the star — stars themselves, planets, comets, meteors. What is left?

Perhaps it was not a single heavenly object, but a collection of them, an unusual collection that (*alternative 9*) would attract the eyes of astrologers and have significance to them.*

The only objects in the sky that regularly change their position and that form impressive combinations now and then, are the members of the Solar system. Of these, we can omit the comets and meteors, since the former are impressive in themselves and require no combinations, and the latter move too rapidly and endure too briefly to form definite combinations. We can omit the Sun, since that drowns out everything in

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**For the data I cite in connection with alternative 9, I am indebted to an article "Thoughts on the Star of Bethlehem" by Roger W. Sinnott in the December 1968* Sky and Telescope.

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its vicinity and forms no visible combinations, and the Moon as well, since it overwhelms other objects with which it might form a visible combination.

That leaves us the five visible planets — Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Every once in a while, two or more of these planets shine close to each other in the sky, and very often this makes for a startling combination. Such a situation is not at all uncommon, and, according to Sinnott, there were between 12 B.C. and 7 A.D. no less than 200 occasions when two planets were fairly close to each other in the sky and 20 occasions when more than two were.

That averages out to roughly one a month, and it seems to me that astrologers wouldn't be impressed by them, unless they represented something very unusual, or noticeable, or astrologically significant, or, best of all, all three.

We might set up some criteria. The two brightest planets are Venus and Jupiter. Therefore when those two are close together it is the most dazzling of the combinations, especially when they are sufficiently far from the Sun to be seen in a dark sky.

One such combination took place in the hours before dawn on August 12, 3 B.C. At their closest approach, the two planets were separated by only 12 minutes of arc, a distance only 2/5 the Moon's diameter.

Another similar, but much more striking combination, took place after sunset on June 17, 2 B.C. Venus and Jupiter approached more closely on this occasion and, at the closest, were separated by only 3 minutes of arc, one-tenth the width of the full Moon.

With that close an approach, it would be difficult to make out the planets as two separate points of light. What's more, as seen from Babylonia, the two planets would be approaching each other steadily as they sank toward the western horizon. Indeed, they would reach their minimum separation at 10 P.M., Babylonian time, just as they were setting. We might imagine that the watching astrologers would see the two planets apparently join into one as they reached a point on the western horizon in the direction of Judea.

Is the fact that the unusual "star" was seen in the direction of Judea enough to make them think of a Messiah? Well, there's more.

An important Messianic prophecy in the Bible is ascribed to Jacob on his death bed. He says something mystical about each of his sons, and this is taken as a reference to the future of each tribe.

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Concerning Judah (from whom David, and therefore Jesus, were descended), he said:

Genesis 49:9. *Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?*

Genesis 49:10. *The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.*

The 9th verse is an indication that the lion was the totemic symbol of the tribe of Judah (we still speak of the "Lion of Judah"). As for the 10th verse, there is a lot of argument about the meaning of Shiloh.

Shiloh was the name of a town at which an important shrine existed before the days of the Kingdom, and it was destroyed a century before David's time. The verse seems to make little sense in that case, and it may be the result of a copyist's error. However, one might argue that it referred to the coming *once more* of the destroyed shrine at Shiloh; hence, by analogy; to the revival of the destroyed Davidic dynasty, and, therefore, to the Messiah. The verse is very commonly viewed as a Messianic prophecy.

Now it so happens that one of the constellations of the Zodiac is Leo (the Lion). It would be easy for astrologers to suppose that Leo represents Judah and the House of David. There is a reference to "a lawgiver from between his feet" and between the forefeet of the constellation, Leo (as conventionally drawn in ancient times) was its brightest star, Regulus (Latin for "little king"). We might suppose, then, that Regulus, in particular, would represent the Messiah (to astrologers).

As it happens, the Venus-Jupiter combinations of 3 B.C. and of 2 B.C., both took place in the constellation, Leo, one on one side of Regulus, and one on the other. In each case, the planetary combination was about 3 degrees away from Regulus, close enough to be impressive to astrologers.

We have then a single unusual "star" appearing on the horizon over Judea, close to the star that symbolizes the Messiah. Wouldn't you think the astrologers would leave for Judea at once to search for him, even if only to check their own conclusions?

Of course both combinations took place in the summer months and nowhere near the time of Christmas, but that doesn't matter. The December 25 date has no Biblical warrant and was chosen in early

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Christian times merely to compete with the Mithraist festival on that day and to take advantage of the long-established tradition of general jubilation at the time of the winter solstice.

Then, too, both Matthew and Luke place the birth of Jesus in the time of Herod, and that monarch died in 4 B.C. It would seem then that Jesus could not have been born later than 4 B.C. and so could not have been less than two years old at the time of the second and more impressive combination. However, the fact that Jesus was born *precisely* at the time of the appearance of the combination may have been a later improvement on the story.

I must admit that the development of alternative 9 is so attractive that I am tempted to believe it — but I won't. In 2 B.C., astronomy was in the doldrums, and even if Babylonian astrologers noted the combination, I doubt that they were so versed in the details of the scriptures and legends of the Judeans as to attach Messianic importance to it. No, the whole tale is but an ingenious working-out after the fact.

So I'll stick to my skepticism and place the Star of Bethlehem in the same category with the parting of the Red Sea and with walking on water and with all the other miracles in the Bible. They are merely wonder-tales that we would utterly ignore as unworthy of attention, except for the fact that they are *our* wonder-tales, which we were taught in impressionable youth to revere.

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"Mathematics underlies everything in this universe," Taggart said. . . ."Think what would happen if a person who understood all those equations started tinkering around . . ."

The Man Who Read Equations

by LIL AND KRIS NEVILLE

Jerry Taggert was getting on 40 when he came to town from some little place down in Arkansas. That was over 20 years ago. I always thought it was his dog, more than anything else, that caused us to wonder most what he did for a living.

In winter it gets pretty nippy here in Carthage. The snow's been so heavy at times that it breaks off big tree limbs, and they close the grade schools for the day. You can drive out Kellog Road and see the white smoke coming up from the hedgerow where Taggert's chimney is, and you'll know that he's settled in, warm as toast. Except sometimes in winter, it'll be weeks before that smoke shows up. Turn in, and Taggert's old '47 two-door Ford won't be in the little garage he had a carpenter add to the cabin 15 years ago. Coon dog will be there, though, skinny and sorrowful looking. That old hound will be sitting there waiting as if for him to get back from the store in town.

Now, we always figured if he was gone some distance and some time, then how was it the old coon hound didn't just starve, or more likely, as old hounds like that do, finally pull up and trot off to try to scrounge something from the next farm, old Shorty Rider's place a half mile on toward Carterville?

That puzzled us all, and I don't think anybody will be able to solve that equation: how Taggert managed to keep that old dog fed when he was gone.

I suppose there were a half a dozen of us, over the years, who got closer to Jerry Taggert than most. We'd drop by his cabin unannounced, and if we caught him in, we'd chat a bit and have a drink or two.

Three or four times a year, he'd come along hunting with us. He

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was a little too impatient for a fisherman, but I've sat on the riverbank with him more than once. He went frogging with Tim Morris. Sometimes he'd run little favors for people in his car. For all I know, he may have helped some out with cash.

Taggert would bet on things, and never lacked for money. He'd be out hunting with me, and he'd offer to bet 10 to 1 that the dove wouldn't fly off the telephone wire before we got a shot at it. Particularly if there was any wind to rock the wire a little, he'd lay 5 to 1 that I couldn't knock off its head at the distance. Or 3 to 2 it'd still be fibrillating when we found it in the grass.

I was out hustle hunting some quail with him one day, and he told me that the human mind works on mathematical principles and that these computer fellows were into something with what they were doing.

"You can bet on that," I said. "When you can take a bead on a square mile of ocean from the moon and drop a rocket right there on it, or skim along less than 100,000 miles from the top of Jupiter, you got a pretty good idea of what you're up to."

"It goes even deeper," Taggert said. "Mathematics underlies everything in this whole universe. And in all the others, too, if there are any, as there well may be. Let me tell you what I mean —

"Take primitive life. It takes food in at one end and spits out waste matter at the other. There's a kind of symmetry to it, like breathing or anything else.

"Well, now, you might say that babies do this, too. Did you ever think of that? They take food in one end and spit waste out the other. You might say that people basically differ in their personalities in a way that corresponds directly to how they learned to feel about this. When they were babies, were they more into taking food in or were they more into letting the waste out?"

"That's positively Freudian," I said.

"At the extremes," Taggert continued, "you've got the anally fixated and the orally fixated, but from these the campanulate curve rises to the center, where most of us are at. You see this bell-shaped-curve phenomenon repeated everywhere. It's the matrix for probabilities whose sum is reality.

"You needn't necessarily think of it as a bell-shaped curve, even. You can make a little graph, if you want to, and have this line at a 90-degree angle on it, or an open-ended asymptotic curve. You read up the left ordinate to see how anally fixated you are, and you read down the right ordinate to get the

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reciprocal, which quantifies your oral fixation."

Taggert stopped talking, almost embarrassed. He looked over to see if I were appreciative of what he was laying down on me. I thought it over for a bit and nodded my head. "You just about hit it right on the nose."

"If you can't compute it," Taggert said, "it doesn't exist."

I'll lay you 100 to 1 that if you were to have given him some kind of complicated algebra problem, he wouldn't have known where to start to solve it, let alone the calculus. He just sort of intuited mathematics. He told me once that he just got his head in tune with the universal equations.

"They tell you how it's all put together, from human society to the motion of the galaxies and the quanta," he said.

We got the impression that he probably made his money when he went away on trips by making bets, but I don't think you could actually cite chapter and verse of Taggert actually telling you so. If someone would have come up and said, "What do you really think Jerry Taggert does for a living?" you'd get most people to say, "Oh, he's a betting man. He knows lots of odds. He's a damned good judge of people and can get them riled up enough to make foolish wagers."

Nobody, as I say, can cite chapter and verse, but I expect I can come as close to it as anyone.

One of the last times I saw Taggert, he and I drove down to Tulsa in his car to see a man about a couple of old wire-barreled 12-gauge shotguns. Taggert'd been drinking beer before I met him, and I guess that afternoon we'd done between us a good half case or more. He got to talking quite expansive, for him, as we cruised along at about 75 on the interstate highway.

"A man can get all kinds of bets," Taggert said, "if he's a betting man. He can look at the polls in the paper and figure they're not going to be wrong when they say it ain't even going to be very close. Man takes the favorite and gives 5 to 1 or anything that's credible. You'll get action. Same with sporting events, if you pick them right. There's more lead-pipe cinches out there than you can shake a stick at, and lots of people who want to get involved and throw their money away because they believe in their party or their team.

"And there's always cards. But you need patience for that, and you need to travel around a lot, hitting the Legion and the lodge people's conventions. It's somewhat dangerous, too. Lots of times, there'll be somebody in the pot that's not too honest. You spot him, and he'll

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want to brawl to save his name, and maybe he'll leave you with a bleeding mouth before you get the whole message out, or a concussion, or even worse.

"And there's other things you can look at. Now, for example, you take the reason politicians give you for doing something. You know that's not the reason they give among themselves, and it's not the reason they tell themselves alone, and it sure as hell is not the real reason. The real reason involves the sweep of things, the equations underneath it all. You look into them and see the real reason.

"Well, if you spend the time to study them out," Taggert continued, "then you can lay your money down and it comes back as sure as sunrise. Because that's what you're really betting on: how it's going to be, regardless."

After looking around for highway patrol cars or motorcycle cops, Taggert took another swig of the Budweiser he was drinking and chucked the empty onto the floor in back.

"You got to be careful," he said. "If you tell these people about these larger events that lay in the future, you'll set in motion a feedback circuit. It's like in higher math, where you can demonstrate that interfering in a process results in changing it in an unpredictable way. You got to place bets very carefully in that area, and you can't go to the well too often, for damned sure. Think what would happen if a person who understood all those equations started tinkering around out there. Tell you this for sure, the underlying order would be changed into chaos! And if you think things are in a mess now —"

I figured Taggert was a little too clever for the rest of us, and maybe that was the one time he let down his guard enough to let somebody peek into his real thoughts. On the other hand, he might just have been putting me on, too.

I had some questions to ask Taggert after that on certain matters both political and otherwise that I hadn't had any reason to think before that he kept up on. He was pretty hard to pin down, I came to realize pretty soon, and always had been. Thinking back, it seemed to me that except for betting, when he'd call the odds he'd take, he'd hardly ever even pass an opinion on the time of day.

I don't think he was trying to tell me anything in particular on that trip to Tulsa; he was probably just rambling along, like you do when you're drinking beer. And I certainly don't think that things getting into so much worse a mess than they were at this time last year is in any way connected with this. But I do know this. It's been

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just a year since Jerry Taggert went on one of his trips, and I don't think, now, he'll ever be back.

I know if a man is going to take off on a trip, and he's a man like Taggert, he's going to make provisions for that hound of his. That's just what a man does. You take care of your old dogs in this part of the country and down there in Arkansas where he comes from.

Whatever provision Taggert made for that coon hound has now run out. Old Shorty Rider said that dog came creeping up to his farm last week, all skin and bones and just short of starved to death.

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A welcome new short story from Larry Niven, who recently had a new collection of his stories published by Ballantine under the title, A HOLE IN SPACE.

The Nonesuch

by LARRY NIVEN

There was one breed of predator on Haven, and it covered that world. If ever there had been other predators, they must have died out long ago, unable to compete. No predator of Earth — wolf, hyena, lion — could have matched a killer who could read the minds of its prey.

The first generation of men on Haven had lived behind electrified barbed wire, with electrified double gates arranged in pairs, air lock fashion. The predators never tried to break through the barrier, and they never missed a man who ventured beyond. Large armed groups usually returned with members missing, and the survivors had never seen a thing.

Haven was a lush green world, but the Haven colony seemed doomed. How could men conquer a world from behind barbed wire?

Thirty years of that, and then a defence was found.

Afterward it was as if there were no predators at all on Haven. The colony bloomed. But the first settlers still tended to stay within the city, and the tale of the *nonesuch* remained.

The nonesuch was stalking a young girl.

He had not caught sight or smell of her. But, beyond a rise of rolling green hill, he had touched her mind. Her rather pleasant thoughts trickled through his brain, and he moved toward her.

The nonesuch was lazy by inclination. He rarely had trouble keeping himself fed. The prey never ran, not if he was careful. And the girl seemed in no hurry.

The nonesuch didn't hurry either. He plodded upward, toward the crest of the hill.

Starbase Town was well behind her. Doris MacAran strolled

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through a dwarf forest, smiling as she sniffed the smells of growing vegetation. Alien smells, but not to her. She wore a back pack and canteen. The eggs and sugar and flour and ham in her back pack were for old Hildegarde Burns, Great-Aunt Hildegarde, who couldn't come to town herself because she'd sprained an ankle. And Great-Uncle Horace was at a silver-mining site far east of here ... but who would need an excuse to go hiking on a day like this?

Doris MacAran. Sixteen years old, black-haired, darkly tanned, healthy, active, uncommonly pretty. Her health was a matter of selection, derived from eight great-grandparents who had been chosen to colonize a world. Active: well, on a colony world everyone walked. The vehicle industry was rolling along, but what they were building was VTOL craft to explore the further reaches of the continent.

She ate as she walked: nuts and sugar-coated puffed wheat, an adequate trail snack. Dry grey bushes gave off a spicy smell as she brushed by them. She passed spear trees, slender vertical shafts of red wood, each with an artificial looking ball of green leaves at the point. Sometimes she angled her path to cross a patch of mattress plant. Mattress plant was like thick-piled green cotton with roots, one plant sometimes covering an acre of ground, delightful to walk on. It was all familiar, part of her world.

She kept a rhythmic pace, placing her feet almost heel-to-toe in a walk that moved the mass of her back pack straight forward instead of bouncing it up and down. In an hour she'd be in sight of the Burns' house, and no trouble finding it. People who lived this far from Starbase Town usually preferred hilltops.

The nonesuch paused at the crest of the hill. He looked; he sniffed. Sight and smell were none too sharp in a nonesuch, and the girl was too far downslope. But her thoughts were clear and bright. Her brain was larger and more intelligent than any native to this world, excepting that of another nonesuch. Intelligence was a liability on Haven. A large brain, clear thoughts, made it easy for a nonesuch to follow.

The nonesuch was not a local. He had wandered into this area, following a rich concentration of the thoughts of edible beings. The locals were few, and none had challenged him for territory. He was big, his claws were sharp, he could fight.

The locals were few. That was peculiar, with thousands of human minds clustered a few miles distant,

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and thousands more scattered throughout the region, all broadcasting clear, bright thoughts. The locals left the humans strictly alone. They were numerous and easy to follow, but a local nonesuch would not prey on them. Why?

He would learn.

The nonesuch knew from her thoughts that the girl had not seen him, was not looking toward him. He started down the hill.

Slender spear trees, low grey bushes, patches of mattress plant. Nothing big could hide in such cover. Then what was it Doris had seen moving on the side of that big hill? There were no big animals in this region of Haven, except for domestic sheep and cattle ... and perhaps a nonesuch or two, Doris thought, smiling at herself.

Motion near the hill's green crest. She'd looked again and it hadn't been there. A cloud shadow? Or another hiker? Perhaps she'd have company when she finished her walk.

Pity Mark hadn't been able to join her. She toyed with a daydream: he'd finished early — the computer he had to fix had been unplugged or something — and he had followed her. Without a pack he could double her pace.

Or it was a nonesuch. But no, she could do without such company!

The nonesuch: she'd heard about it as a child. *Don't go outside the city without an adult, Little Doris. The nonesuch will get you. You'll never know it's there, because it's always behind you.*

Why, Dad?

Because it's so ugly, Little Doris. It won't let you see it. It's ashamed of the way it looks.

She smiled, remembering how solemnly she'd listened. And there had been stories of bad little girls eaten by the nonesuch... Of course that had been a long time ago...

The nonesuch had fallen flat and frozen when he sensed the girl looking toward him. Now, as she resumed her rhythmic stride, he began moving again. But he was disturbed.

The picture in the girl's mind was very like a nonesuch.

It stood upright on its hind legs, on broad flat feet. Its head was round, its neck virtually nonexistent. Its eyes were tiny and close-set. Its teeth were large and triangular, and two large fangs protruded over the lower lip in front. Its skin was smooth, mottled in two shades of greenish brown. Brown hair flopped forward from the crown of its head. Its hands were big, like a man's, with both thumbs missing, and each finger was tipped with a crescent claw.

It was not quite a nonesuch, this

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picture in the girl's mind; some of the features were humanized. But it was close enough. She should have been frightened, but no: what she felt was certainly not fright.

The nonesuch was wary. He would follow his habit. He would not let himself be seen.

...a long time ago. Dad and his nonesuch! And her uncles were in on it too. It had been years before she caught on.

It's always behind me, is it, Dad? Then I'll never know if it's real or not, will I? But how do you know what it looks like, Dad, if nobody's ever seen one?

And finally Dad and Uncle Ray had laughed and given in. The nonesuch was like Santa Claus: a story. Adults thought it was fun to tell stories to kids. For a year or so afterward she'd wondered if Earth was another such tall story. But Earth was real; there were pictures, there were infrequent starships...

The nonesuch had a problem. It had run across a grazer.

The small, fast beast was even closer than the girl. It was moving round and round the borders of a mattress plant, trimming the borders with blunt teeth. The nonesuch sensed its placid thoughts, its continuous dull hunger and its continuous chewing. It hadn't seen him yet.

The nonesuch was torn. He could have been on the grazer in a few minutes. The grazer would make a good meal ... but at the last moment it was bound to make some disturbance, and the girl would turn and see him.

With some regret the nonesuch moved on. He sensed the animal's sudden start as it saw him, then fear and frantic haste, dwindling with distance.

It was curiosity that moved the nonesuch after the more difficult prize. Partly it was: *how will human meat taste?* — and partly: *why do the others leave these beasts alone?* One question might answer another. Human meat might be poisonous, or unpalatable. But no local nonesuch had told him so.

In fact, they would not answer him at all on this subject.

And partly it was: *She knows of me, but she doesn't believe in me. Incomprehension.* Something alien here, something that went with the girl's quiet conviction that she had come from a different world.

She was thinking of a man now ... a man somewhat older than she, who had not proposed sex to her but who might ... and her imagination was working in all her senses. The nonesuch savored sensations sharper than his own even in imagination: sight and touch and somasthesia. He liked this girl's mind.

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He would have liked to talk to her..

Why not? She was not a nonesuch ... she was very alien ... but surely there must be concepts basic to all life. The nonesuch thought it through, then projected the most universal message he knew.

I'M GOING TO EAT YOU

There! She had reacted, a tensing of viscera, her head turning to look behind her, a shiver ... but now she had forgotten. He had not truly reached her mind. She lacked that sense entirely, like any animal. Pity.

Instead he savored in anticipation her sudden sharp knowledge, there at the end, when she would realize the reality of the nonesuch. How would it feel to her? To him? He increased his pace.

She looked back as she passed a barrel tree. For an instant she was *sure* there was something behind her. She almost went back to look. Then one of the pig-sized grazing beasts went bounding past her as if death itself were at its heels, and she went on, laughing. When they put those oversized hind legs to the test, the bounders always looked like they were trying to do somersaults.

She ought to be getting close to Great-Aunt Hildegarde's house. The pack was getting heavy.

And there was still that feeling of something *behind* her.

The barrel tree was a piece of luck. A nonesuch was big. He could never have fed himself had he not been unusually good at the predator business. A barrel tree was about the only growing thing big enough to hide a nonesuch. He kept the thick trunk and dark green crown between himself and the girl as he moved in for the kill.

When he reached the barrel tree, the girl was twenty meters beyond. Close enough. A nonesuch was no good for a long chase, but for short sprints he could move like light itself.

Her back was to him.

He charged.

She heard something. She turned, awkwardly because of the weight of the pack.

She saw him.

It was just as Dad and Uncle Ray had described it. Tiny, close-set eyes; wide mouth with triangular buck teeth; floppy mop of brown hair; big hands with long nails; short legs and big clumsy feet. A vicious caricature of some yokel farmhand, and it was gallumping toward her with clawed hands outstretched in moronic lust.

Doris's eyes bugged. A giggle bubbled up into her throat and hung there. There *wasn't* any such thing. She *knew* that. Was she

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losing her mind? She closed her eyes hard, so tight it hurt, then opened them fast.

Sure enough, there was nothing there.

She looked about her, searching for the pattern of shadows that must have sparked that ridiculous illusion. A passing cloud shadow, perhaps? Nothing.

She'd been stupid; she'd gone too long without a rest break. Doris walked back to the only shade in sight — the barrel tree — dropped her pack against its trunk and sat down under the crown of dark green leaves.

It was the dull gnawing of hunger that brought him back to himself. Had he been asleep? Asleep, standing up?

Memory came joltingly. The nonesuch mewled and began patting himself with his hands. Yes, he could feel that. *That* was real.

He had not been asleep. The nonesuch knew what sleep felt like. He had been — gone. Now he was back (he felt his face; the claws pricked his skin); he was back, yes. From where?

From nothing.

She'd looked at him and not believed. Looked at him and seen — illusion, a trick of the mind, a trick of light and shadow. She'd convinced him in that moment, and there had been telepathic feedback, and — he was gone. Gone, until hunger made him real again.

There was a grazer nearby, wandering toward him around the curve of a mattress plant. He plodded toward it, reluctantly, prodded by sharp hunger. The girl was nowhere near. He must have been gone for a long time.

The grazer hadn't seen him yet.

Suppose it refused to believe in him?

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Robert Aickman ("The Clock Watcher," June 1974) returns with a fine and scary tale about Hilary Brigstock and what happens , when after twenty years, he visits the site of the strange and tragic death of a childhood friend.

The Same Dog

by ROBERT AICKMAN

Though there were three boys, there were also twelve long years between Hilary Brigstock and his immediately elder brother, Gilbert. On the other hand, there was only one year and one month between Gilbert and the future head of the family, Roger.

Hilary could not remember when first the suggestion entered his ears that his existence was the consequence of a "mistake." Possibly he had in any case hit upon the idea already, within his own head. Nor did his Christian name help very much: people always supposed it to be the name of a girl, even though his father asserted loudly on all possible occations that the idea was a complete mistake, a product of etymological and historical ignorance and of typical modern sloppiness.

And his mother was dead. He was quite unable to remember her, however hard he tried, as he from time to time did. Because his father never remarried, having as clear and definite views about women as he had about many other things, Hilary grew up against an almost entirely male background. In practice his background seemed to consist fundamentally of Roger and Gilbert forever slugging and gashing at one another, with an occasional sideswipe at their kid brother. So Hilary, though no milksop, tended to keep his own counsel and his own secrets. In particular there are few questions asked by a young boy when there is no woman to reply to them, or, at least, few questions about anything that matters.

The family lived in the remoter part of Surrey. There was a very respectable, rather expensive semi-infant school, Briarside, to which most of the young children were directed from the earliest age

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practicable. Hilary was duly sent there, as had been his brothers ahead of him, in order to learn some simple reading and figuring and how to catch a ball, before being passed on to the fashionable preparatory school, Gorselands, on his way to Cheltenham or Wellington. Some of the family went to the one place, some to the other. It was an unusual arrangement, and outsiders could never see the sense in it.

Almost unavoidably, Briarside was a mixed establishment (though it would have been absurd to describe it as co-educational), and there Hilary formed a close and remarkable friendship with a girl, two years older than himself, named Mary Rossiter. The little girls at the school were almost the first Hilary had ever met. Even his younger cousins were all boys, as happens in some families.

Mary had dark frizzy hair, which stuck out round her head, and a rather flat face with, however, an already fine pair of large dark eyes, which not only sparkled but seemed to move from side to side in surprising jerks as she spoke, which, if permitted, she did almost continuously. Generally she wore a shirt or sweater and shorts, as little girls were beginning to do at that time, and emanated extroversion; but occasionally, when there was a school celebration, more perhaps for the parents than for the tots, she would appear in a really beautiful silk dress, eclipsing everyone, and all the more in that the dress seemed not precisely right for her, but more like a stage costume. Mary Rossiter showed promise of natural leadership (some of the mums already called her "bossy"), but her fine eyes were for Hilary alone, and not only her eyes but hands and lips and tender words as well.

From within the first few days of his arrival, Hilary was sitting next to Mary in the classes (if such they could be called) and partnering her inseparably in the playrooms and the garden. The establishment liked the boys to play with the boys, the girls with the girls; and normally no admonition whatever was needed in those directions; but when it came to Hilary and Mary, the truth was that already Mary was difficult to resist when she was set upon a thing. She charmed, she smiled, and she persisted. Moreover, her father was very rich, and it was obvious from everything about her that her parents doted on her.

There were large regions of the week which the school did not claim to fill. Most of the parents awaited the release of their boys and girls and bore them home in small motorcars of the wifely kind. But Mary was left, perhaps

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dangerously, with her freedom, simply because she wanted it to be like that. At least, she wanted it to be like that after she had met Hilary. It is less certain where she had stood previously. As for Hilary, no one greatly cared — within a wide span of hours — whether he was home or not. There was a woman named Mrs. Parker who came in each day and did all that needed to be done and did it as well as could be expected (Hilary's father would not even have considered such a person "living in"); but she had no authority to exercise discipline over Hilary and, being thoroughly modern in her ideas, no temperamental inclination either. If Hilary turned up for his tea, it would be provided. If he did not, trouble was saved.

Hilary and Mary went for long, long walks, for much of the distance, hand in hand. In the midst of the rather droopy and distorted southern Surrey countryside (or one-time countryside), they would find small worked-out sandpits or, in case of rain, disused collapsing huts; and there they would sit close together, or one at the other's feet, talking without end and gently embracing. He would force his small fingers through her wiry mop and make jokes about electricity coming out at the ends. She would touch the back of his neck, inside his faded red shirt, with her lips and nuzzle into the soft fair thicket on top of his head. They learned the southern Surrey byways and bridlepaths remarkably thoroughly for six or eight miles to the southeast and six or eight miles to the southwest; and, in fact, collaborated in drawing a secret map of them. That was one of the happiest things they ever did. They were always at work revising the secret map, by the use of erasers, and adding to it, and coloring it with crayons borrowed from Briarside. They never tired of walking because no one had ever said they should.

One day they were badly frightened.

They were walking down a sandy track, which they did not exactly know, when they came upon a large property with a wall round it. The wall was high and apparently thick. It had been covered throughout its length with plaster, but much of the plaster had either flaked or fallen completely away, revealing the yellow bricks within, themselves tending to crumble. The wall was surmounted by a hipped roofing, which projected in order to throw clear as much as possible of any rain that might descend, and this roofing also was much battered and gapped. One might have thought the wall to be in a late stage of disease. It was blotched and

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mottled in every direction. Nonetheless, it continued to be very far from surmountable, even by a fully grown person.

Hilary took a run at it, clutching at a plant which protruded from a gap in the exposed pointing and simultaneously setting his foot upon a space where the plaster had fallen away. The consequence was instant disaster. The plant leapt from its rooting, and at the same time the plaster on which Hilary's small weight rested fell off the wall in an entire large slab and shattered into smaller pieces among the rank grass and weeds below, where Hilary lay also.

"Hilary!" It was an authentic scream and one of authentic agony.

"It's all right, Mary." Hilary resolutely raised himself, resolutely refused to weep. "I'm all right."

She had run to him and was holding him tightly.

"Mary, please, I'll choke."

Her arms fell away from him, but uncertainly.

"We'd better go home," she said.

"No, of course not. I'm perfectly all right, I tell you. It was nothing." But this last he did not really believe.

"It was *terrible,*" said Mary with solemnity. She was wearing a skirt that day, a small-scale imitation of an adult woman's tweed skirt, and he could see her knees actually knocking together.

He put his arm around her shoulder but, as he did so, became aware that he was shaking himself. "Silly," he said affectionately. "It wasn't anything much. Let's go on."

But she merely stood there, quivering beneath his extended arm.

There was a perceptible pause. Then she said, "I don't like this place."

It was most unlike her to say such a thing. He had never before known her to do so.

But always he took her seriously. "What's the matter?" he asked. "I *am* all right, you know. I truly am. You can feel me if you like."

And then the dog started barking — if, indeed, one could call it a *bark*. It was more like a steady growling roar, with a clatter mixed up in it, almost certainly of gnashing teeth: altogether something more than barking, but unmistakably canine, all the same — horribly so. Detectably it came from within the domain behind the high wall.

"Hilary," said Mary, "let's run."

But her unusual attitude had put Hilary on his mettle.

"I don't know," he said. "Not yet."

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"What d'you mean?" she asked.

"I see it like this," said Hilary, rubbing a place on his knee. "Either the dog is chained up or shut in behind that wall, and we're all right. Or else he isn't, and it's no good our running."

It was somewhat the way that Mary's own influence had taught him to think, and she responded to it.

"Perhaps we should look for some big stones," she suggested.

"Yes," he said. "Though I shouldn't think it'll be necessary. I think he must be safely shut up in some way. He'd have been out by now otherwise."

"*I'm* going to look," said Mary.

There are plenty of stones in the worn earth of southern Surrey, and many old bricks and other constructional detritus also. Within two or three minutes Mary had assembled a pile of such things.

In the meantime Hilary had gone on a little along the track. He stood there, listening to the clamorous dog almost calmly.

Mary joined him, holding up the front part of her skirt, which contained four of the largest stones, more than she could carry in her hands.

"We won't need them," said Hilary, with confidence. "And if we do, they're everywhere."

Mary leaned forward and let the stones fall to the ground, taking care that they missed her toes. Possibly the quite loud thuds made the dog bark more furiously than ever.

"Perhaps he's standing guard over buried treasure?" suggested Mary.

"Or over some fairy kingdom that mortals may not enter," said Hilary.

They talked about such things for much of the time when they were together. Once they had worked together upon an actual map of Fairyland, and with Giantland adjoining.

"He might have lots of heads," said Mary.

"Come on, let's look," said Hilary.

"Quietly," said Mary, making no other demur.

He took her hand.

"There *must* be a gate," she remarked after they had gone a little further, with the roaring, growling bark as obstreperous as ever.

"Let's hope it's locked then," he replied. At once he added, "Of course it's locked. He'd have been out by now otherwise."

"You said that before," said Mary. "But perhaps the answer is that there is no gate. There can't always be a gate, you know."

But there was a gate; a pair of gates, high, wrought iron, scrolled, rusted, and heavily padlocked.

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Through them Hilary and Mary could see a large palpably empty house with many of the windows glassless and the paint on the outside walls surviving only in streaks and smears, pink, green, and blue, as the always vaguely polluted air added its corruption to that inflicted by the weather. The house was copiously mock-battlemented and abundantly ogeed: a structure, without doubt, in the Gothic Revival taste, though of a period uncertain over at least a hundred years. Some of the heavy chimney stacks had broken off and fallen. The front door, straight before them, was a recessed shadow. It was difficult to see whether it was open or shut. The paving stones leading to it were lost in mossy dampness.

"Haunted house," said Mary.

"What's that?" enquired Hilary.

"Don't exactly know," said Mary. "But daddy says they're *everywhere*, though people don't realize it."

"But how can you tell?" asked Hilary, looking at her anxiously.

"Just by the look," replied Mary with authority. "You can tell at once when you know. It's a mistake to look for too long, though."

"Ought we to put it on the map?"

"I suppose so. I'm not sure."

"Is that dog going to bark all day, d'you think?"

"He'll stop when we go away. Let's go, Hilary."

"Look!" cried Hilary, clutching at her. "Here he is. He must have managed to break away. We must show no sign of fear. That's the import thing."

Curiously enough, Mary seemed in no need of this vital guidance. She was already standing rigidly, with her big eyes apparently fixed on the animal, almost as if hypnotized.

Of course, the tall padlocked bars stood between them and the dog; and another curious thing was that the dog seemed to realize the fact, and to make allowance for it, in a most undoglike manner. Instead of leaping up at the bars in an endeavor to reach the two of them and so to caress or bite them, it stood well back and simply stared at them, as if calculating hard. It barked no longer, but instead emitted an almost continuous sound halfway between a growl and a whine, and quite low.

It was a big shapeless yellow animal, with long untidy legs, which shimmered oddly, perhaps as it sought a firm grip on the buried and slippery stones. The dog's yellow skin seemed almost hairless. Blotchy and draggled, it resembled the wall outside. Even the dog's eyes were a flat, dull yellow. Hilary

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felt strange and uneasy when he observed them, and next he felt upset as he realized that Mary and the dog were gazing at one another as if under a spell.

"Mary!" he cried out. "Mary, don't look like that. Please don't look like that."

He no longer dared to touch her, so alien had she become.

"Mary, let's go. You said we were to go." Now he had begun to cry, while all the time the dog kept up its muffled commotion, almost like soft singing.

In the end, but not before Hilary had become very wrought up, the tension fell away from Mary,and she was speaking normally.

"Silly," she said, caressing Hilary. "It's quite safe. You said so yourself."

He had no answer to that. The careful calculations by which earlier he had driven off the thought of danger had now proved terrifyingly irrelevant. All he could do was subside to the ground and lose himself in tears, his head between his knees.

Mary knelt beside him. "What are you crying about, Hilary? There's no danger. He's a friendly dog, really."

"He's not, he's not."

She tried to draw his hands away from his face. "Why are you crying, Hilary?" One might have felt that she quite urgently needed to know.

"I'm frightened."

"What are you frightened of? It can't be the dog. He's gone."

At that, Hilary slowly uncurled and, forgetting, on the instant, to continue weeping, directed his gaze at the rusty iron gates. There was no dog visible.

"Where's he gone, Mary? Did you see him go?"

"No, I didn't actually *see* him." she replied. "But he's gone. And that's what you care about, isn't it?"

"But *why* did he go? We're still here."

"I expect he had business elsewhere." He knew that she had acquired that explanation from her father because she had once told him so.

"Has he found a way out?"

"Of course he hasn't."

"How can you tell?"

"He's simply realized that we don't mean any harm."

"I don't believe you. You're just saying that. Why are you saying that, Mary? You were more scared than I was when we came here. What happened to you, Mary?"

"What's happened to me is that I've got back a little sense." From whom, he wondered, had she learned to say *that?* It was so obviously insincere that it first hurt and then frightened him.

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"I want to go home," he said.

She nodded, and they set off, but not hand in hand.

There was one more incident before they had left the area behind them.

As they returned up the gently sloping sandy track, Hilary kept his eyes on the ground, carefully not looking at the yellow wall on his left, or looking at it as little as possible, and certainly not looking backwards over his shoulder. At the place where the wall bore away leftwards at a right angle, the track began to ascend rather more steeply for perhaps a hundred yards to a scrubby tableland above. They were walking in silence, and Hilary's ears, always sharper than the average, were continuously strained for any unusual sound, probably from behind the wall, but possibly, and even more alarmingly, ot. When some way up the steeper slope, he seemed to hear something and could not stop himself from looking back.

There was indeed something to see, though Hilary saw it for only an instant.

At the corner of the wall there was no special feature, as one might have half expected, such as a turret or an obelisk. There was merely the turn in the hipped roofing. But now Hilary saw, at least for half a second, that a man was looking over, installed at the very extremity of the internal angle. There was about half of him visible, and he seemed tall and slender and bald. Hilary failed to notice how he was dressed, if, indeed, he was dressed at all.

Hilary jerked back his head. He did not feel able to mention what he had seen to Mary, least of all now.

He did not feel able, in fact, to mention the sight to anyone. Twenty years later, he was once about to mention it, but even then decided against doing so. In the meantime, and for years after these events, the thought and memory of them lay at the back of his mind, partly because of what had already happened, partly because of what happened soon afterwards.

The outing must have upset Hilary more than he knew because the same evening he fell ill and was found by Mrs. Parker to have a temperature. That was the beginning of it, and the end of it was not for a period of weeks, during which there had been two doctors and, on some of the days and nights, an impersonal nurse, or perhaps two of them also. There had also been much bluff jollying along from Hilary's father; Hilary's brothers being both at Wellington. Even Mrs. Parker had to be reinforced by a blowsy teen-ager named Eileen.

In the end, and quite suddenly, Hilary felt as good as new, owing

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either to the miracles of modern medicine or, more probably, to the customary course of nature.

"You may feel right, old son," said Doctor Morgan-Vaughan; "but you're *not* right, not yet."

"When can I go back to school?"

"Do you want to go back, son?"

"Yes," said Hilary.

"Well, well," said Doctor Morgan-Vaughan. "Small boys felt differently in my day."

"When can I?" asked Hilary.

"One fine day," said Doctor Morgan-Vaughan. "There's no hurry about it. You've been ill, son, really ill, and you don't want to do things in a rush."

So a matter of two months had passed before Hilary had any inkling of the fact that something had happened to Mary also. He would have liked to see her but had not cared, rather than dared, to suggest it. At no time had he even mentioned her at home. There was no possibility of his hearing anything about her until his belated return to school.

Even then, the blowsy teen-ager was sent with him on the first day, lest, presumably, he faint at the roadside or vanish upwards to Heaven. His heart was heavy and confused as he walked, and Eileen found difficulty in conversing with a kid of his kind anyway. He was slightly relieved by the fact that when they arrived at the school, she had no other idea than to hasten off with alacrity.

The headmistress (if so one might term her), who was also part-proprietor of the establishment, a neat lady of thirty-six, was waiting specially for Hilary's arrival after his illness and greeted him with kindness and a certain understanding. The children also felt a new interest in him, though with most of them it was only faint. But there was a little girl with two tight plaits and a gingham dress patterned with asters and sunflowers, who seemed more sincerely concerned about what had been happening to him. Her name was Valerie Watkinson.

"Where's Mary?" asked Hilary.

"Mary's dead," said Valerie Watkinson solemnly.

Hilary's first response was merely hostile. "I don't believe you," he said.

Valerie Watkinson nodded three or four times.

Hilary clutched hold of both her arms above the elbows. "I don't believe you," he said again.

Valerie Watkinson began to cry. "You're hurting me."

Hilary took away his hands. Valerie did not move or make any further complaint. They stood facing one another in silence for a perceptible pause, with Valerie quietly weeping.

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"Is it true?" said Hilary in the end.

Valerie nodded again behind her tiny handkerchief with a pinky-blue Swiss milkmaid on one corner. "You're very pale," she gasped out, her mouth muffled.

She stretched out a small damp hand. "Poor Hilary. Mary was your friend. "I'm sorry for you, Hilary."

"Did she go to bed with a temperature?" asked Hilary. He was less unaccustomed than most children to the idea of death because he was perfectly well aware that of late he himself was said to have escaped death but narrowly.

This time Valerie shook her head, though with equal solemnity. "No," she said. "At least, I don't think so. It's all a mystery. We haven't been *told* she's dead. We thought she was ill, like you. Then Sandy saw something in the paper." Sandy Stainer was a podgy sprawling boy with, as one might suppose, vaguely reddish hair.

"What did he see?"

"Something nasty," said Valerie with confidence. "I don't know what it was. We're not supposed to know."

"Sandy knows."

"Yes." said Valerie.

"Hasn't he told?"

"He's been told not to. Miss Milland had him in her room."

"But don't you want to know yourself?"

"No, I don't," said Valerie with extreme firmness. "My mummy says it's enough for us to know that poor Mary's dead. She says that's what really matters."

It was certainly what really mattered to Hilary. He passed his first day back at school looking very pallid and speaking no further word except when directly addressed by Miss Milland or Mrs. Everson, both of whom agreed, after school hours, that Hilary Brigstock had been sent back before he should have been. It was something to which they were entirely accustomed: the children often seemed to divide into those perpetually truant and those perpetually in seeming need of more care and attention than they were receiving at home. That it should be so was odd in such a professional and directorial area; though Mrs. Cartier, who looked in every now and then to teach elementary French, and was a Socialist, said it was just what one always found.

Hilary had never spoken to Sandy Stainer, nor ever wanted to. The present matter was not one which he would care to enquire about in such a quarter. Moreover, he knew perfectly well that he would be told nothing, but merely tormented. Sandy Stainer's lips had somehow been sealed in some remarkably effective way; and he

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would be likely to find in such a situation, clear conscience and positive social sanction for quiet arm-twisting and general vexing of enquirers, especially of enquirers known to be as vulnerable as Hilary. And Mary had been so much to Hilary that he had no other close friend in the school — probably no other friend there at all. Perhaps Hilary was one of those men who are designed for one woman only.

Certainly he had no little friends outside the school, nor had he ever been offered any. Nor, as usual, was the death of Mary a matter that could be laid before his father. In any case, what could his father permit himself to tell him, when all was so obscure, and so properly so?

Within a day or two, Hilary was back in bed once more and again missing from school.

Dr. Morgan-Vaughan could not but suspect this time that the trouble contained a marked element of "the psychological"; but it was an aspect of medicine that had always struck him as almost entirely unreal and certainly as a therapeutic dead end, except for those resolved to mine it financially. He preferred to treat visibly physiological disturbance with acceptably physiological nostra. In the present case he seriously thought of again calling in Dr. Oughtred, who had undoubtedly made a very real contribution in the earlier manifestation of the child's illness.

"Do you read the local paper, Mrs. Parker?" asked Hilary, whiter than the sheets between which he lay.

"I don't get around to it," replied Mrs. Parker, in her carefully uncommitted way. "We take it in. Mr. Parker feels we should."

"Why does he feel that?"

"Well, you want to know what's going on around you, don't you?"

"Yes," said Hilary.

"Not that Mr. Parker reads anything very much. Why should he, when he's got the wireless? The *Advertiser* just piles up in heaps till the waste people come for it from the hospital."

"What do they do with it at the hospital?"

"Pulp it, I believe. You've got to do what you can for charity, haven't you?"

"Bring me all the local papers in the heap, Mrs. Parker. I'm ill too. It's just like the hospital."

"You couldn't read them," said Mrs. Parker, as before, carefully not conceding.

"I *could*," said Hilary.

"How's that? You can't read."

"I can," said Hilary. "I can read almost anything. Bring me the papers, Mrs. Parker."

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She expressed no surprise that he should want to read something so boring even to her, nor did it seem to strike her that there might be anything significant in his demand. In fact, she could think of nothing to say; and as, in any case, she was always wary about what she let fall in the ambience of her employment, she left Hilary's room without one word more.

But, as much as three days later, Eileen had something to say when she brought him his midday meal (not a very imaginative one) and an assembly of pills.

"You *are* old-fashioned," remarked Eileen. "At least that's what Mrs. Parker thinks."

"What d'you mean?" asked Hilary in a sulky tone, because he disliked Eileen.

"Asking for the *Advertiser,* when you can't even read it."

"I *can* read it," said Hilary.

"I know more than Mrs. Parker knows," said Eileen. "It's that little girl, isn't it? Mary Rossiter, your little sweetheart."

Hilary said nothing.

"I've seen you together. I know. Not that I've told Mrs. Parker."

You *haven't?"*

"Not likely. Why should I tell *her?"*

Hilary considered that.

Hilary was clutching with both hands at the sheet. "Do you know what happened to Mary?" he asked, looking as far away from Eileen as he could look.

"Not exactly. She was interfered with, and mulled about. Bitten all over, they say, poor little thing. But it's been hushed up proper, and you'd better hurry and forget all about her. That's all you *can* do, isn't it?"

In the end, having passed at Briarside and at Gorselands through the more difficult years of the Second World War, Hilary went to Wellington also. His father thought it a tidier arrangement, better adapted to more restricted times. By then, of course, Hilary's brothers, Roger and Gilbert, had left the school, though in neither case for the university. There seemed no point, they decided, and their father had had no difficulty in agreeing. He had been to a university himself, and it had seemed to him more of a joke than anything else, and a not particularly useful one.

Despite the intermittent connection with Wellington, theirs had not been a particularly army family, and it was with surprise that Mr. Brigstock learned of his youngest son's decision to make the army his career, especially as the war was not so long concluded. Hilary, as we have said, was no milksop; and no doubt the Wellington ethos had its influence;

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but, in any case, it is a mistake to think that an officers mess is manned solely by good-class rowdies. There are as many (and, naturally, as few) sensitive people in the army as in most other places, and some of them find their way there precisely because they are so.

A further complexity is that the sensitive are sometimes most at their ease with the less sensitive. Among Hilary's friends at the depot was a youth named Callcutt, undisguisedly extrovert, very dependable. On one occasion Hilary Brigstock took Callcutt home for a few days of their common leave.

It was not a thing he did often, even now. The atmosphere of his home still brought out many reserves in him. It would hardly be too much to say that he himself went there as little as possible. But by now both Roger and Gilbert were married and had homes of their own, as they frequently mentioned, so that Hilary was beginning to expect qualms within him on the subject of his father's isolation, and surely, loneliness. Late-middle-aged people living by themselves were always nowadays said to be lonely. Unlike most sons, Hilary at times positively wished that his father would marry again, as people in his situation were expected to do, that his father's views on the subject of women had somehow become less definite.

And really the place was dull. Stranded there with Callcutt, Hilary perceived luminously, as in a minutely detailed picture, how entirely dull, in every single aspect, his home was.

More secrets are improperly disclosed from boredom that from any other motive, and more intimacies imparted, with relief resulting, or otherwise.

"I love it here," said Callcutt, one day after lunch, when Mr. Brigstock had gone upstairs for the afternoon, as he normally did.

"That's fine," said Hilary. "What do you love in particular about it?"

"The quiet," said Callcutt immediately. "I think one's home should be a place where one can go for some quiet. You're a lucky chap."

"Yes," agreed Hilary. "Quiet it certainly is. Nowadays, at least. When my two elder brothers were here, it wasn't quiet at all."

"Remind me where they are now?"

"Married. Both of them. With homes of their own."

"Nice girls?"

"So-so."

"Kids?"

"Two each."

"Boy?"

"All boys. We only breed boys."

"Only?"

"There hasn't been a girl in the

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Brigstock family within living memory."

"Saves a lot of trouble," said Callcutt.

"Loses a lot of fun," said Hilary.

"Not at that age."

"*Particularly,* perhaps, at that age."

"How's that? You're not one of those Lolita types, like old whatnot?"

"When I was a child I knew a girl who meant more to me than any girl has meant to me since. More, indeed, than anyone at all. Remember that I never knew my mother."

"Lucky chap again," said Callcutt. "Well, in some ways. No, I shouldn't have said that. I apologize. Forget it."

"That's all right."

"Tell me about your girl friend. I'm quite serious. As a matter of fact, I know perfectly well what you meant about her."

Hilary hesitated. Almost certainly, if it had not been for the absence of other topics, other possible activities, other interests, he would never have mentioned Mary Rossiter at all. He had never spoken of her to a soul for the twenty years since she had vanished, and for at least half that time he had thought of her but infrequently.

"Well, if you like I *will* tell you. For what it's worth, which isn't much, especially to a third party. But we've nothing else to do."

"Thank the Lord!" commented Callcutt.

"I feel the Brigstocks should do more to provide entertainment."

"Good God!" rejoiced Callcutt.

So, for the first time, Hilary imparted much of the story to another. He told how sweet Mary Rossiter had been, how they used to go for surprisingly long walks together, how they found the crumbling wall and heard, and later saw, the shapeless slithery dog, which seemed the color of the wall, and saw also the collapsing mansion or near-mansion, which Mary, just like a kid had immediately said must be a haunted house. Hilary even told Callcutt about the maps that the two children had drawn together and that they had been maps not only of Surrey, but of Fairyland, and Giantland, also.

"Good preparation for the army," observed Callcutt.

But Hilary did not tell Callcutt about the lean, possibly naked, man he had so positively seen at the extremest angle of the wall. He had been about to tell him, simply without thinking, at the point where the incident occurred in the narrative; but he passed over the matter.

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"Bloody savage dogs!" said Callcutt. "I'm against them. Especially in towns. Straining at the leash, and defecating all over the pavements. Something wrong with the owner's virility, I always think."

"This was the worst dog you ever saw," Hilary responded. "I'm quite confident of that."

"I hate them all," said Callcutt sweepingly. "They carry disease."

"That was the least in the case of the dog I was talking about," observed Hilary. And he told Callcutt of what had happened next — as far as he could tell it.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed Callcutt.

"I suppose it was what people used to call a mad dog."

"But that was well before your time, even if you *were* a kid. There aren't so many mad dogs these days. Anyway, what happened to the dog? Shot, I take it?"

"I have no idea."

"But surely it must have been shot? Things couldn't just have been left at that."

"Well, probably it was shot. I just don't know. I wasn't supposed to know anything at all about what had happened."

"Good God, it *should* have been shot. After doing a thing like that."

"I daresay it *was*."

There was a pause while Callcutt wrestled with his thoughts and Hilary with his memories, memories of which he had remembered little for some longish time past.

"It was the most frightful thing," Callcutt summed up at last. "I say, could we pay a visit to the scene of the crime? Or would that be too much?"

"Not too much if I can find the place." This was indeed how one thing led to another. "I haven't been there since."

"I suppose not," said Callcutt, who hadn't thought of that. Then he added: "What, never?"

"Never," said Hilary. "After all, I'm not here very often."

"Whose car shall we take?"

"As far as I can recall the lie of the land, we had better walk. I daresay it's all mobile homes and bungalows by now."

And so, substantially, it proved. It would. It would no doubt be wrong to suggest that the municipal authority or statutory body or honorary trustees responsible for the conservation of an open space had in any major degree permitted the public heritage to diminish in area or beauty, but whereas formerly the conserved terrain had merged off into pastures and semiwild woodland, now it seemed to be encircled almost up to the last inch with houses. They were big expensive houses, but they had converted the wilderness of Hilary's

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childhood into something more like a public park, very beaten down and with the usual close network of amateur footpaths, going nowhere in particular because serving no function. Round the edge of this slightly sad area Hilary and Callcutt prowled and prospected.

"It was somewhere about here," said Hilary. "Certainly on this side."

"I should have said it had all changed so much that we were unlikely to get far without comparative maps. None of these houses can be more than ten or twelve years old."

They varied greatly in style: from Cotswold to Moroccan, from Ernest George to Frank Lloyd Wright. Some seemed still to value seclusion, but more went in for neighborliness and open plan. Despite all the desperation of discrepancy, there was a uniformity of tone which was even more depressing.

"I agree that my place had disappeared," said Hilary. "Been built over. Of course it was pretty far gone even then."

The houses were served by a rough road, almost certainly "unadoped." It assured them a precarious degree of freedom from casual motor traffic.

One of the biggest houses was in the Hollywood style: a garish structure with brightly colored faience roof, much Spanish ironwork, mass-produced but costly, and a flight of outside steps in bright red tiles. The property was surrounded by a scumbled white wall. Hilary and Callcutt stared in through the elaborate garden-of-remembrance gates.

"It's like a caricature of the old place," said Hilary. "Much smaller, and much louder — but still..."

The windows were all shut and there was no one in sight. Even the other houses seemed all to lie silent, and on the rough road nothing and no one passed. The two men continued to peer through the bars of the gate, ornate but trivial.

From round the back of the house to their left emerged, in like silence, a large molting yellow dog. They could hardly even hear the patter of its large feet on the composition flagstones.

Hilary said nothing until the dog, which originally they saw head on, had turned and, with apparent indifference to them, displayed the full length of its right flank. Then he spoke: "Bogey," he said, "that's the same dog." Callcutt was known to his intimates as Bogey, following some early incident in his military life.

Callcutt thought before speaking. Then he said, "Rubbish, Hilary. Dogs don't live twenty years." But he wasn't quite sure of that.

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"That one has."

But now the dog began to bark, growling and baying most frighteningly, though, as on the previous occasion, not coming right up to the gate, nor attempting to charge at them. If the fact that, a moment before, it seemed not to have seen them might have been attributed to extreme senility, there was nothing remotely senile about its furious, almost rabid aggression now, and even less, perhaps, about the calculating way it placed itself, whatever might have been the reason. It stood a shapeless sulfurous mass on its precisely chosen ground, almost like a Chinese demon.

"That is just what it did before," Hilary shouted above the uproar. "Stood like that and came no nearer."

"If you can call it standing," Callcutt shouted back.

He was appalled by the dog and did not fail to notice that Hilary had turned white and was clinging to the decorative gatebars. But in the end Callcutt looked upwards for a second. He spoke again, or rather shouted. "There's a wench at one of the upstairs windows. We'd better clear out."

Before Hilary had managed any reply, which the barking of the dog in any case made difficult, there was a further development. The glass-paneled front door opened, and a woman walked out. Perhaps she had emerged to quiet the dog and apologize, perhaps, on the contrary, to reinforce the dog's antagonism to strangers: to Hilary it was a matter of indifference. The woman was about his own age, but he knew perfectly well who she was. She was the grown-up Mary Rossiter, who twenty years before had been killed by a dog, probably a mad dog, possibly a dog that had been shot, certainly a most unusual dog, this very present dog, in fact.

Whatever he felt like, Hilary did not pass out. "Do you mind if we go?"

He withdrew his gaze and, without really waiting for Callcutt, began to walk away sharply. Again, it was somewhat as on the previous occasion: veritably, he was behaving exactly as a small boy might behave.

He did not pace out along the rough road, past the houses. Instead, he walked straight into the dilapidated public forest. Callcutt had almost to run after him in a rather absurd way.

Hilary could not be unaware that while he retreated, the dog had stopped its noise. Perhaps he had even gone far enough to have passed beyond earshot, though it seemed unlikely. None the less, it was quite a chase for Callcutt and with the most uncomfortable overtones.

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Hilary pulled himself together quite quickly, however — once more, as before, and was even able to tell Callcutt exactly what he had apprehended — or, as he put it to Callcutt, fancied.

"I'd have taken to my heels myself, I promise you that," said Callcutt.

"I know it was Mary," said Hilary. "I know it."

They remained silent for some time as they walked over the patchy, tired ground.

Then Callcutt spoke. There was something he could not keep to himself, and Hilary seemed all right now.

"You know how we were laughing about the names of those houses? Samandjane, and Pasadena, and Happy Hours, and all that; the executive style. Do you know what the doggy house is called?"

Hilary shook his head. "I forgot to look."

"You wouldn't believe it. The name above our heads was Maryland."

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Acrostic Puzzle by Georgia F. Adams

This puzzle contains a quotation from a work in science fiction. First, guess as many of the clues as you can and write the word or words in the numbered blanks opposite the clues. Put those letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. If your words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. Fill in the missing letters and put them in the numbered spaces opposite the clues. That will help you guess those words and therefore get more of the puzzle, and so on. You don't need to be familiar with the quotation in order to work the puzzle. The first letters of the correctly answered clues will spell out the name of the author and the title of the work from which the quotation is taken.

A. Author of *S is for Space* (first name)											
	55	70	35								
B. Author of *A Touch of Infinity* (first name)											
	62	103	128	85	19	124					
C. What *The Planet Buyer* bought											
	21	87	104	14	83						
D. 1950 Asimov book (two words)											
	6	81	12	32	52	110					
E. An astronaut _____ a spacesuit											
	17	27	36	72	90						
F. This author's recent book won two awards											
	73	78	98	93	105	116					
G. A space traveler is concerned about what he _____ on a strange planet.											
	125	123	135	132							
H. Conceptions											
	41	18	54	111	7						
I. A Science Fiction award											
	22	10	34	3	50	131					
J. Book by Murray Leinster (two words)											
	142	97	122	30	8	16	43	69	61	51	
K. It is approximately 15 billion _____ from the earth to the moon.											
	47	71	4	9	42	65					
L. *The _____ is a Harsh Mistress*											
	11	2	59	28							
M. *Childhood's* _____											
	39	75	140								
N. _____ *Across the Cosmos*											
	63	13	129	49	38	138					
O. _____ *Eighty-Four*											
	89	64	106	114	1	139	127	118			
P. One of a series of collections and revolutions											
	67	40	56	141	23						

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Q. Visitors from another planet? 121 15 74 26

R. What our sun is composed of 76 24 29 45 96

S. Author of *Dune* 5 57 68 77 133 68 113

T. Author of N 58 80 37

U. Units of electrical resistance 119 120 20 46

V. _____ *of Space* 60 130 102 79 94

W. To bind or fasten with a rope 25 31 134 99

X. _____ *First is Too Late* (two words) 136 44 100 92 66 84 109 48 101 95

Y. Author of *Destination: Universe!* 126 115 137 53 108 107 91

Z. Gave relief to 82 33 112 86 117

Solution will appear in next month's issue.

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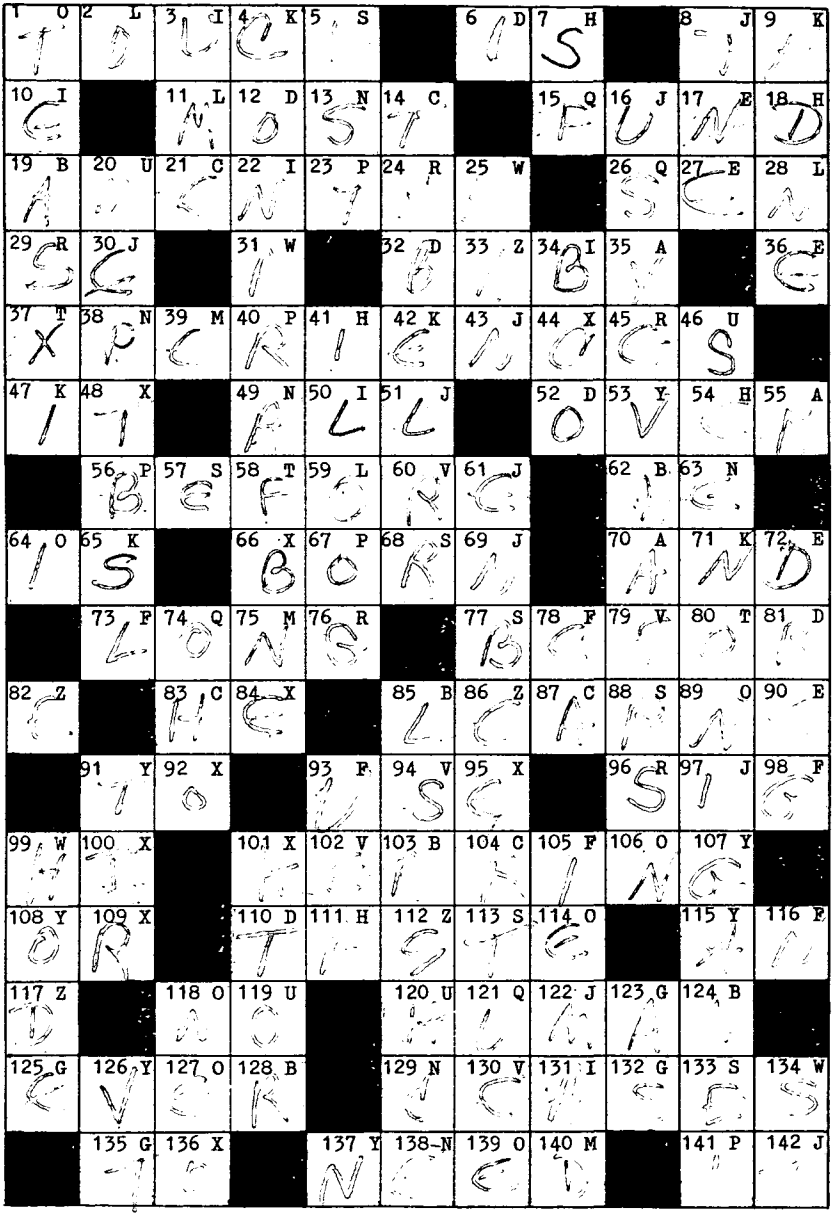

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